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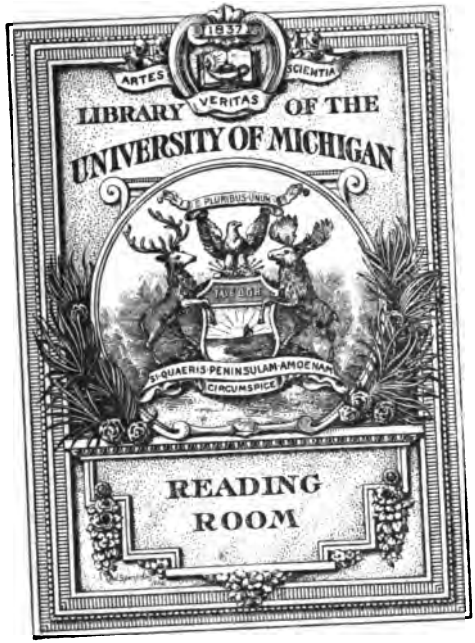
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THE

WORKS

OF

JAMES THOMSON.

WITH HIS LAST

CORRECTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS.

IN THREE VOLUMES COMPLETE.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

By PATRICK MURDOCH, D.D. F.R.S.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

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MDCCLXXXVIII.

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AGAMEMNON.

A

TRAGEDY.

TO

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE PRINCESS OF WALES.

MADAM,

I HUMBLY beg leave to put this Tragedy under the protection of your ROYAL HIGHNESS; and hope you will condescend to accept of it, as a testimony of the most unfeigned and zealous respect, due no less to your amiable virtues, than to your high rank, from,

MADAM,

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Most dutiful, and

Most obedient humble Servant,

JAMES THOMSON.

PROLOGUE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF EURYDICE.

SPOKEN BY MR. QUIN.

WHEN this deciſive night, at length, appears,
The night of every author's hopes and fears;
What ſhifts to bribe applauſe, poor poets try?
In all the forms of wit they court and lye:
Theſe meanly beg it, as an alms; and Thoſe,
By boaſtful bluſter dazzle and impoſe.
Nor poorly fearful, nor ſecurely vain,
Ours would, by honeſt ways, that grace obtain,
Would, as a free-born wit, be fairly try'd:
And then—let truth and candour, fair, decide.
He courts no friend, who blindly comes to praiſe;
He dreads no foe—but whom his faults may raiſe.
Indulge a generous pride, that bids him own,
He aims to pleaſe, by noble means, alone;
By what may win the judgment, wake the heart,
Inſpiring nature, and directing art;
By ſcenes, ſo wrought, ſo rais'd, as may command
Applauſe, more from the head, than from the hand.
Important is the moral we would teach:
(Oh may this Iſland practiſe what we preach!)
Vice in its firſt approach with care to ſhun;
The wretch who once engages, is undone.
Crimes lead to greater crimes, and link ſo ſtreight,
What firſt was accident, at laſt is fate:
Guilt's hapleſs ſervant ſinks into a ſlave;
And virtue's laſt ſad ſtrugglings cannot ſave.
" As ſuch our fair attempt, we hope to ſee
" Our judges,—here at leaſt,—from influence free;
" One place—unbias'd yet by party rage,—
" Where only honour votes,—the *Britiſh* ſtage.
" We aſk for juſtice, for indulgence ſue:
" Our laſt beſt licence muſt proceed from you."

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

AGAMEMNON, - -	Mr. QUIN.
EGISTHUS, - - -	Mr. MILWARD.
MELISANDER, - -	Mr. CIBBER.
ARCAS, - - -	Mr. WRIGHT.
ORESTES, - - -	Mr. GREEN.
TALTHYBIUS Herald, -	Mr. HAVARD.

Officers, &c.

CLYTEMNESTRA, - -	Mrs. PORTER.
CASSANDRA, - -	Mrs. CIBBER.
ELECTRA, - - -	Miſs BRETT.
ATTENDANT of Clytemneſtra,	Mrs. FURNIVAL.

Trojan captives, &c.

SCENE, The palace of AGAMEMNON, in Mycenæ.

AGAMEMNON.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA *ſitting in a diſconſolate poſture, and her* ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

O Clytemnestra! O my royal miſtreſs!
Can then no comfort ſoothe your woes a while?
E'er ſince that flaming ſignal of ſack'd Troy,
That ſignal fix'd and promis'd by the king,
Was ſeen ſome nights ago, nor food has paſs'd
Your loathing lips, nor ſleep has bleſs'd your eyes.
Or if perhaps a tranſient ſlumber huſh'd
Your ſighs a moment, and reſtrain'd your tears;
Sudden, you, ſtarting wildly, would exclaim
Of guilt, Egiſthus, Troy, and Agamemnon.
Sure, 'tis too much, my queen.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Away! away!
Since my loſt ſtate admits of no relief,

To that ſad comfort of the wretched leave me,
To yield me to my ſorrows.

ATTENDANT.

Hear me, Madam,
Once the dear burden of theſe aged arms!
My tender care from life's firſt opening bud!
My joy! my glory! hear your faithful ſervant,
And, let me add, your friend.—In reaſon's eye,
That never judges on a partial view,
Far leſs than your misfortune is your guilt.——
Your guilt—Forgive me, 'tis too harſh a word,
For what deſerves compaſſion more than blame.
I know the treacherous ways by which you ſunk,
From pleaſing peace, to theſe unhappy fears,
This anxious tumult.——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hide me from the view!
All comfort is in vain.—Away!

ATTENDANT.

Allow me
To plead your injur'd cauſe againſt yourſelf.
When Agamemnon led the Greeks to Troy,
And left you, Madam, for the pomp of war;
Left you the pride of Greece in full-blown beauty,
The kindeſt mother and the fondeſt wife;
If Fame ſays true, for Trojan captives left you—
But that apart.—How did he leave you, ſay?
Afflicted, out-rag'd, as a queen and mother;
Betray'd to Aulis with your firſt-born hope,
The blooming Iphigenia, under feint
Of her immediate marriage to Achilles;
And there no ſooner at the wind-bound fleet

Arriv'd, but you beheld her ſpotleſs blood
Stream on the ſully'd altar of Diana,
The price of winds, of a dear-purchas'd gale,
To bear them on to Troy. Thus pierc'd with grief,
Then fir'd by turns to rage, almoſt to vengeance,
At an ambitious cruel haughty huſband;
While all your paſſions were together mix'd,
And ready for a change; was you not left
In a ſubmiſſive ſoothing lover's power,
Ordain'd your partner in the ſovereign rule,
O'er Argos and Mycenæ, but to you
As pliant ſtill as Agamemnon ſtately?

CLYTEMNESTRA, *riſing.*

Alas! too true! You touch the ſource of woe.
Why did you leave me, barbarous Agamemnon?
Why leave me weeping o'er a murder'd daughter?
Why helpleſs leave me to a troubled mind?
Ah! why yourſelf betray me to a lover?
What arts Egiſthus us'd too well I know;
All that can ſoftly ſteal, or gayly charm,
The heart of woman——Hence, dear ſad ideas!
Deſtroyers hence! And dare you tempt me ſtill,
Perfidious Sirens! in that very moment
When your falſe charms have wreck'd my peace for ever?
Oh, Nature! wherefore, Nature, are we form'd
One contradiction? the continual ſport
Of fighting powers? Oh! wherefore haſt thou ſown
Such war within us, ſuch unequal conflict,
Between ſlow reaſon and impetuous paſſion?
Paſſion reſiſtleſs hurries us away,
Ere lingering reaſon to our aid can come,
And to upbraid us then it only ſerves.
Tormentor, ceaſe!

ATTENDANT.

You wrong yourſelf too much.
Think, Madam, how for years you baffled love:
Nor could Egiſthus, tho' he touch'd your heart,
Tho' many a midnight tear, and ſecret ſigh,
To me, and me alone, diſclos'd the pangs
That dimm'd your fading cheek; yet could he not,
With all his arts, his love, ſubmiſſion, charms,
O'ercome the ſtruggling purpoſe of your ſoul;
Till Meliſander, to a deſart iſle,
He baniſh'd from your ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, Meliſander!
Given to the beaſts a prey, or wilder famine;
Ah, periſh'd friend! ſerene directing light,
By Agamemnon left to guide my counſels;
Whom every ſcience, every muſe adorn'd,
While the good honeſt heart enrich'd them all;
Oh hadſt thou ſtill remain'd, then I, this day,
Had been as glorious as I now am wretched!
There breathes a felt divinity in virtue,
In candid unaſſuming generous virtue,
Whoſe very ſilence ſpeaks; and which inſpires,
Without proud formal leſſons, a diſdain
Of mean injurious vice. But loſt with him,
With Meliſander, reaſon, honour, pride,
Truth, ſound advice, my better genius fled;
I friendleſs, flatter'd, importun'd and charm'd,
Was left alone with all-ſeducing love;
Love to the future blind, each ſober thought,
Each conſequence deſpiſing, ſcorning all,
But what its own enchanting dreams ſuggeſt.
What could I do?—Away! ſelf-flattering guilt!

I ſhould have thought, when honour once is ſully'd,
Not weeping mercy's tears can waſh it clean;
And that one blot on mine diffus'd a ſtain
O'er the proud honour of a wedded king,
And o'er my children's, my poor blameleſs children's!
Whoſe cheeks will kindle at their mother's name:
I ſhould have thought—Would I could think no more!
To think is torture!

ATTENDANT.

What avails it, Madam—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Meliſander! if the dead could hear,
I would invoke thy friendly influence now,
Would wiſh thee preſent in this hour of trouble.
Perhaps there is in wiſdom, gentle wiſdom,
That knows our frailties, therefore can forgive,
Some healing comfort for a guilty mind,
Some power to charm it into peace again,
And bid it ſmile anew with right affections.
No! fruitleſs wiſh!—It cannot, cannot be!
Egiſthus who may henceforth give me laws,
Dread of diſcovery, that worſt tyrant, ſhame,
And my own conſcious blotted heart forbid it,
Forbid retreat——

ATTENDANT.

Madam, behold the man,
Who, then upon the watch, obſerv'd the ſignal
Of conquer'd Troy, and now attends your orders
To give a full account of what he ſaw.

SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *her* ATTENDANTS, *and the* MAN *who obſerved the ſignal.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Are you then ſure that you beheld this ſignal?
Or was it not ſome viſion of the brain,
That painted, while you ſlept, your waking wiſh?
Or elſe perhaps ſome meteor of the night?

MAN.

Madam, Troy doubtleſs lies one heap of ruins;
I ſaw the ſignal of its fate diſtinctly.
The night was dark and ſtill. A heavier gloom
Ne'er cover'd earth. In low'ring clouds, the ſtars
Were muffled deep; and not one ray, below,
O'er all Mycenæ glimmer'd, or around it.
When ſtrait, at fartheſt eaſt, a ruddy light
Sprung up, and, wide-encreaſing, roll'd along;
By turns diminiſh'd, and by turns renew'd,
A wave of fire: at laſt, it flam'd, confeſs'd,
From iſle to iſle, and beachy point to point:
Till the laſt blaze at Nauplia ended, plain.
A glorious ſight! and as a Greek rejoic'd me.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

How ſits the wind?

MAN.

It blows from Troy, direct;
A bold and ſteady gale.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis well. Retire.
Your care and faithful pains ſhall be rewarded.

SCENE III.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *her* ATTENDANT.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes! he comes! the hapleſs victor comes!
Even now his trophy'd veſſel ſtreaks the main,
And ploughs the billows with triumphant prow;
Or by glad crowds receiv'd, perhaps, he hails
His native ſhore, and preſſes on to ſhame.
Even now with glory charg'd, with conqueſt gay,
Crown'd with the laurels of ten famous years,
He dreams to join them to the peaceful olive;
And after rugged toils and perilous war,
Soft to repoſe him on the myrtle bed
Of calm domeſtic bliſs. How vain the hopes!
How ſhort the proſpect of believing man!
I dare not look before me, dare not paint
The riſing ſtorm.

ATTENDANT.

Behold Egiſthus, Madam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me.

SCENE IV.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS, *after ſome ſilence.*

And is it thus, O Clytemneſtra,
Thus that, in hours of danger, lovers meet?

[*Pauſing.*

Still coldly ſilent, ſtill the look averted,
Where not one ſoftneſs glows? While anger, fear,
Diſguſt, and ſick repentance, ſhifting, cloud
Your varied cheek. 'Tis plain you never lov'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh that I never had!

EGISTHUS.

You never did.
The very power to wiſh it proves you did not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He ne'er deſerv'd my love, who dares ſuſpect it.

EGISTHUS.

Not to ſuſpect it, weakneſs were and folly.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nor only doubt; believe your doubts.

EGISTHUS.

I do.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

You do!

EGISTHUS.

Nay more, am of their truth aſſur'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis baſe, ungrateful, an ungenerous inſult,
To tell me this. Urge not too far, Egiſthus,
Urge not too far my guilt-dejected ſpirit.
Tho' you have trampled on my haughty virtue,
That noble pride of ſoul, which knows no fear,
And bears no inſult; yet to you, at leaſt,
To you of all mankind, I will be bold,
As I had never err'd, will be a queen,
The blood of Jove, be Clytemneſtra ſtill.

EGISTHUS.

Be temperate, Madam: I have told you nothing,
But that I am not worthy of your love.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Curſe on that pride! which, with affected brow,
Humility conceals. And am I then ſo vile,
So loſt to reaſon, honour, common honour;
As without love, that all-compelling fury,
Without debaſing, thoughtleſs, blind blind love;
To bow me from the height of happy life,
To this low fearful ſtate of coward ſhame?
Miſtake me not—I would not waſte one word,
One paſſing word, affronted thus to ſave you
From jealouſy's worſt rage; did not, alas!
A kind of mournful juſtice to myſelf
Tear from my ſwelling heart the mean confeſſion.
How art thou fallen! to what diſhonour fallen!
Unhappy Clytemneſtra!

EGISTHUS.

Harſh conſtruction!
And yet theſe frowns delight, that anger charms me.
O more than lovely! O majeſtic fair one!
Since you then know the jealous force of love,
Forgive its tender fears, its fond offence;
Offence I could not mean.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ill-fated ſhe!
Who muſt forgive.

EGISTHUS.

Nay, rather caſt me from you,
Than thus upbraid me with ſo forc'd a pardon.

O Clytemneſtra! where are now thoſe looks,
Thoſe looks of ſmiling heaven, of radiant ſweetneſs,
That wak'd our morn of love? Within whoſe ſphere,
No evil durſt approach, no ſadneſs dwell;
While the charm'd gazer knew nor fear nor danger?
And ſet they then at laſt in gloomy quarrels?
Let us not quarrel. Why ſhould lovers quarrel?
Life is for that too ſhort, too precious time;
Theſe moments chiefly, theſe impetuous moments,
That to the brink of ruin ſeem to roll
Our mingled fate. Even now—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis true! 'Tis true!
Alas! methinks, in every hollow blaſt,
That ſhakes this palace, Agamemnon comes.
Yes, yes, Egiſthus, ſtill a proof remains,
A matchleſs proof of love, I mean to give you.
Glad will I throw this regal pomp aſide,
And, inſtant, with you ſeek ſome diſtant country,
Some gloomy Thracian dale, where piny Hemus
May wrap us in impenetrable ſhade:
There, there, the coarſeſt life, fed by hard toil,
Will be luxurious eaſe to what I feel,
To this big pang that labours at my heart,
And fires my mingling paſſions into anguiſh.
Quick! let us fly, Egiſthus, fly this moment!
The next may ſeize us, bind us down to ſhame,
Deteſted ſhame!

EGISTHUS.

What! Clytemneſtra! fly!
That is indeed the road direct to ſhame,
To infamy for ever. He who flies,
In war or peace, who his great purpoſe yields,

He is the only villain of this world:
But he who labours firm and gains his point,
Be what it will, which crowns him with ſucceſs,
He is the ſon of fortune and of fame,
By thoſe admir'd, thoſe ſpecious villains moſt,
That elſe had bellow'd out reproach againſt him.
Beſides your huſband, your vain-glorious huſband,
Proud Agamemnon, who ten years has warr'd
At Troy, to ſcourge your ſiſter Helen's rape,
Dream you that he would not purſue our flight,
Tho' we took ſhelter in Cimmerian ſhades,
And drag us back, the ſcorn of hiſſing Greece,
To then deſerv'd, to true, unpity'd ſhame?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Excuſe my weaker heart. But how, Egiſthus,
How ſhall I bear an injur'd huſband's eye?
The fierceſt foe wears not a look ſo dreadful,
As does the man we wrong.

EGISTHUS.

Madam, your fears
Caſt a falſe glare upon your troubled reaſon,
That blinds it quite.—An injur'd huſband he!
He wrong'd! No, Clytemneſtra never, never,
Can never wrong her tyrant Agamemnon,
Tyrant of common Greece; can never wrong
The man who leaves her ten regardleſs years,
For the vain honours of a fooliſh war;
Nay, who conſum'd thoſe years, if Fame ſpeaks true,
In nothing leſs than war; inſtead of war,
In ſhameful ſquabbles with his nobler friends,
About their captive females, training out
An amorous revel rather than a war,
Far from his country, family, and queen.

And can you wrong this falſe one? Think of Aulis.
How baſely to that port you was betray'd,
And what dire nuptials waited there your daughter.
Think with what price he bought his cruel trophies.
Behold the firſt-born bloſſom of your youth,
Your Iphigenia, her mild eyes dejected,
Her cheek o'ercaſt with fear, her boſom bare,
An helpleſs, harmleſs, uncomplaining victim,
Stabb'd by the murderous Calchas; whilſt her father,
Her unrelenting father, to protect
The ſacrifice, ſtands by. Behold, ſhe bleeds,
Pours the rich ſtream ſhe drew from that fair boſom,
Falls like a drooping flower untimely cut;
And all to purchaſe for her ſire's impatience,
From ſome fell demon that bely'd Diana,
A riſing gale. The gale begins to blow,
The pendants flutter; when away he goes,
Gaily he goes; and leaves a wretched mother
To weep her murder'd child.—If yet one ſpark
Of wonted ſpirit burns in Clytemneſtra,
If ſhe ſtill lives to juſtice and to nature;
Theſe, theſe are wrongs, that call aloud for vengeance;
And there are hands that boldly—ſtart not, Madam—
That will with pride avenge you.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! what hands?
What vengeance, ſay? Touch not ſo wild a ſtring;
It wakes new diſcord in my jarring ſoul.
To the juſt gods, not us, pertaineth vengeance.
I cannot, will not, e'er conſent to—Gods!
Where roves my tongue?—You did not mention that,
You did not mean it ſure—O ſpare, Egiſthus,
In pity ſpare my laſt remains of virtue!

Oh make me not beyond recovery vile!
A horror to myſelf!—How wretched they,
Who feel, yet cannot ſave, their dying virtue!
[*A ſhout heard.*
What means this tranſport of the madning people?
Oh my preſaging heart!—Save me!—Again!
Ah! little think they how their joy diſtracts me!

EGISTHUS.

Some move this way—Reſume your temper, Madam.

SCENE V.

To CLYTEMNESTRA *an* OFFICER *belonging to the court.*

OFFICER.

Madam, the king is near, from Nauplia comes;
But ſuch rejoicing crowds around him throng,
As makes his journey ſlow. Juſt now arriv'd
Talthybius brings the news, and craves admittance.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Conduct him hither.

SCENE VI.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *alone.*

Oh too faithful ſignal!
Now muſt I take another ſtep in vice.
Down, ſtubborn heart! and learn diſſimulation:
Yes, learn to ſmile, tho' ſorrow wrap thee round;
Learn to be friends with baſeneſs.—See! how gay
This herald ſtrides along! Miſtaken man!

SCENE VII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, TALTHYBIUS, *with ſome* Grecian *ſoldiers that attend him.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Welcome, Talthybius; welcome, ye brave Greeks,
How fares the king?

TALTHYBIUS.

Madam, the king is well;
Health, happineſs, and glory, join to crown him.
His heart, impatient to confer with yours,
Sends me before him with its warmeſt wiſhes,
Its warmeſt gratulations. "Tell," he ſaid,
"Go tell my Clytemneſtra, that the thoughts
"Of meeting her awake a dearer joy
"Than conqueſt ever gave: even tedious ſeems
"My people's love, that loſes me a moment."
This crown, which circled once the royal brows
Of Hecuba, of Priam's lofty queen,
He prays you to accept.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

There ſet it down.
I own, Talthybius, the ſoft moiſture fills
My womaniſh eyes, while on the ſudden turns
Of fate I think, on fortune's ſad reverſes.
Oft when blind mortals think themſelves ſecure,
In height of bliſs, they touch the brink of ruin.
But ſure your voyage has been wondrous quick,
Not three full days.—Is all the fleet return'd?

TALTHYBIUS.

No, Madam; none, except this ſingle ſhip,
Which bore the king: the reſt are ſcatter'd wide.
When to the joyous breeze we ſpread our ſails,
And left that bay, where Simois and Scamander
Mix with the rapid Helleſpont; while Troy,
Or what was Troy, yet wreathing ſmoak to heaven,
And Ida's woody top, receding, ſunk
Beneath the trembling main, the ſky was fair;
And, wing'd our courſe with ſlender airs, we ſail'd,
Till ſtrait, as evening fell, the fluttering gale,
Encreaſing gradual from the red north-eaſt,
Blew ſtiff and fierce. At laſt the tempeſt howl'd.
Next morning, nought but angry ſeas and ſkies
Appear'd, conflicting, round. Mean time, right on,
Our ſtrong-ribb'd veſſel drove before the blaſt,
That, falling ſomewhat of its fury, gave us
A quick auſpicious voyage. Safe, we paſs'd
The Cyclad iſles, that, o'er the troubled deep,
Seem'd then to float amidſt the mingling ſtorm.
Only at one, with much ado, we touch'd,
Nor without riſque.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And why?

TALTHYBIUS.

Madam, compell'd
By ſacred pity. On the foaming beach,
A miſerable figure beck'ning ſtood,
Horrid and wild, with famine worn away.
His plaintive voice, half by the murmuring ſurge
Abſorpt, juſt reach'd our ears. In Greek he call'd,
And ſtrong adjur'd us by the gentle gods,
That make the wretched their peculiar care,

To bear him thence, from ſavage ſolitude,
Into the cheerful haunts of men again.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What?—Of condition look'd he?

TALTHYBIUS.

So he ſeem'd;
Tho' dimm'd by helpleſs ſolitary life.
The king regards him much—Forgive me, Madam;
I ſee the rueful image but diſturbs
Your generous ſoul.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I thank you, good Talthybius;
And from the king himſelf will learn the reſt.
This ring, on which a victory is carv'd
With curious art, befits the news you bring.
I am your debtor ſtill; and, ſoldiers, yours.

ACT II. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ATTENDANT.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

ARRIV'D ſo ſoon! I am not half prepar'd:
My features all are ſunk with conſcious ſhame;
My eyes are yet too tender to diſſemble.

ATTENDANT.

Madam, be firm. Wipe off theſe gloomy tears,
In which too plain is read your troubled ſoul.
Juſt now the trumpet ſpoke the king's approach.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis come, at laſt, the trying hour is come!
Oh that my heart were hard, and features falſe!—
Again theſe trumpets ſwell——

ATTENDANT.

A moment, Madam,
A moment will betray you.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Open, Earth,
And ſwallow up my ſhame!—What can I do?
Where look? what ſay? confuſion! torture!

ATTENDANT.

Madam——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, coward that I am! Was there no dagger,
To ſave this tenfold death?

ATTENDANT.

Hark! loud and near,
The triumph comes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Well—give me breath——
[*Endeavouring to compose her agitation.*

AGAMEMNON, *behind the Scenes.*

A moment
Leave me, my friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! heard you not his voice?
Yes, yes, 'tis he! Go bring my children hither:
They may relieve me.

ATTENDANT.

O remember!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heavens!

SCENE II.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA.

AGAMEMNON.

Where is my life! my love! my Clytemneſtra!
O let me preſs thee to my fluttering ſoul,
That is on wing to mix itſelf with thine!
O thou, for whom I live, for whom I conquer,
Than glory brighter! O my Clytemneſtra!
Now, in this dear embrace, I loſe the toils
Of ten years war; abſence, with all its pains,
Is by this charming moment wip'd away.

All-bounteous gods! Sure, never was a heart
So full, ſo bleſt as mine.— [*Diſcovering her diſorder.*
But whence, my faireſt!
What mean theſe tears?—Not tears of happy love,
Such as I ſhed.—What means that clouded look,
Whoſe downcaſt ſweetneſs will not ſhine upon me?
Why this cold meeting? Why unkindly damp'd
My ardor thus? Oh ſpeak, my Clytemneſtra!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Forgive me, Agamemnon; but I cannot,
Alas! I cannot ſee your face again,
Without reflecting where I ſaw you laſt.
Aulis is preſent to my eyes anew,
The ſhips, the chiefs, the guards, the bloody Calchas,
All the dire pomp of ſacrifice around:
Anew my daughter bleeds, baſely deceiv'd!
And when I ſee that awful brow, that doom'd her,
Can Agamemnon wonder at my tears?

AGAMEMNON.

Why will my Clytemneſtra add new ſtings
To what here rankles but too deep already?
Ah! why impute to me the work of Fate?
'Tis not indulging private inclination,
The ſelfiſh paſſions, that ſuſtains the world,
And lends its rulers grace; no, 'tis not thence
That glory ſprings, and high immortal deeds:
The public good, the good of others, ſtill
Muſt bear fond nature down, in him who dares
Aſpire to worthy rule; imperious honour
Still o'er the moſt diſtinguiſh'd lords it moſt.
Was it for me?—Let even your paſſions judge—
For Agamemnon was it, when ordain'd,
By common voice, the general of the Greeks;

While twenty kings beneath my banner march'd;
And while around me full-aſſembled Greece,
Indignant, kindled at your ſiſter's rape,
On her old native foe demanding vengeance,
On faithleſs Aſia: Was it then for me,
To quench this glorious flame? And to refuſe
One life to thouſands, to thoſe generous thouſands,
That for my honour, for the dearer honour
Of Clytemneſtra's family, ſtood all
Prepar'd to die? If to the mingled voice,
Of honour, duty, glory, public good,
Of the commanding gods, I had been deaf;
And, in the feeble father, poorly ſunk
The Greek, the chief, the patriot, and the king,
Greater than king, the general of the Greeks;
Then you yourſelf, my Clytemneſtra's ſelf,
Muſt (let her heart avow the truth) have ſcorn'd me.
Nor think it was an eaſy reſignation.
Oh Clytemneſtra! Had you ſeen within,
What here within my tortur'd boſom paſs'd;
To that my battles ſince were only ſport.
No, not the kindeſt mother, bath'd in tears,
As o'er her agonizing babe ſhe hangs,
Feels what I ſuffer'd then—You may remember—
Again the father melts me at the thought—
You may remember how I hid my face;
Aſham'd to let the Greeks around behold
The tears, that miſbecame their general's cheek.
Then ceaſe to blame what rather merits pity,
I might add praiſe.—He, who the father's heart
More tender has than mine, too tender has it.
I love my children, as a father ſhould;
Beſides, I love them from a ſofter cauſe,
I love my Clytemneſtra.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Had, alas!
Had Agamemnon lov'd me, would he, nay,
Could he have left me in the rage of grief,
My daughter yet freſh bleeding in my ſight?
Left me ſo long? love ſurely muſt have found,
In the wide round of ten revolving years,
Some way to ſee me, to prevent theſe ſorrows—
Why was I thus abandon'd, Agamemnon?

AGAMEMNON.

Let me kiſs off theſe tears. O beauteous tears!
If ſhed by doubting love, if ſhed for abſence.
Inſtead of theſe reproaches, aſk me rather,
How I that abſence bore: and here all words,
All eloquence is dumb, to ſpeak the pangs,
That lurk'd beneath the rugged brow of war.
When glaring day was clos'd, and huſh'd the camp,
Oh! then, amid ten thouſand other cares,
Thoſe ſtung the keeneſt that remember'd thee,
That on my long-left Clytemneſtra thought,
On what wild ſeas and mountains lay between us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Unhappy man!

AGAMEMNON.

What ſays my Clytemneſtra?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Unhappy mortals! by vain words deceiv'd,
To their own pride, to joyleſs honour ſlaves.

AGAMEMNON.

He, he, alone, can claim a right to bliſs,
Who has fulfill'd the painful taſk of honour.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But what avails a right to vaniſh'd bliſs?

AGAMEMNON.

Let me once more adjure thee, Clytemneſtra,
By every tender name of love adjure thee,
To loſe in kind oblivion theſe our paſt—
I would not call them quarrels—Ah! there was,
There was a time—I will indulge the thought—
When everlaſting tranſport tun'd our ſouls:
When join'd to vernal life, the ſpring of love
Around us gaily blow'd! and heaven and earth,
All ſmiling nature look'd delighted on.
Yet, would my Clytemneſtra lend her aid,
I know a paſſion ſtill more deeply charming
Than fever'd youth e'er felt; and that is love,
By long experience mellow'd into friendſhip.
How far beyond that froward child of fancy!
With beauty pleas'd a while, anon diſguſted,
Seeking ſome other toy; how far more noble
Is this bright offspring of unchanging reaſon,
That fonder grows with age, and charms for ever!
It is not often, Clytemneſtra, thus,
That I ſubmit to double my entreaties;
But, oh deſtroy not the collected hopes
Of life and love! Oh make not conqueſt hateful!
I ſhall abhor it, if it coſt me thee,
Coſt me thy love. A daughter was too much,
And ten years abſence from my Clytemneſtra.
Add not to theſe a loſs I cannot bear,
The loſs of thee, thou lovelieſt of thy ſex!
And once the kindeſt!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh!

AGAMEMNON.

Turn not away;
There is relenting goodneſs in thy look.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Alas! untimely fondneſs——Agamemnon!
Too generous Agamemnon! you diſtreſs me.
Would you were not ſo kind, ſo tender, now!
Or ne'er had been ſo cruel!

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis unjuſt
To call me cruel. Fate, the Gods, our fortune
Were cruel to us both—What could I more
To ſooth our parting woes, and eaſe my abſence?
I left you Meliſander to adviſe you,
Left you the wiſeſt, faithfulleſt and beſt—
Oh whiſpering nature! Are not theſe my children?

SCENE III.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, ORESTES.

AGAMEMNON.

My daughter! my Electra!

ELECTRA.

O my father!

AGAMEMNON.

Come to my arms, my boy! my dear Oreſtes!
In whom I live anew, my younger ſelf!
And thou, Electra! in thy opening cheek

I mark thy mother's bloom : even ſo ſhe look'd,
Such the mild light with which her beauty dawn'd.
Oh thou ſoft image of my Clytemneſtra!
My other Iphigenia!

ELECTRA.

Oh my father!
My joy! my pride! my glory! whom, in dreams,
I oft have ſeen, as if return'd from Troy;
But ſtill unwelcome morning, with a tear,
Wip'd out the dear illuſion of the night.
And is it then no more a faithleſs viſion?
Oh, 'tis my father! whoſe departure hence,
And Iphigenia's death, I juſt remember.
How glorious, Iphigenia, was thy death!
A death I envy rather than lament.
Who would not die to gain immortal fame,
Deliver Greece, and crown a father's glory?

AGAMEMNON.

Come to my arms again, my generous daughter!
And thou my ſon! O that thy tender years
Had ſuffer'd thee to ſhare our toils at Troy!
'Tis war that forms the prince: 'tis hardſhip, toil;
'Tis ſleepleſs nights, and never-reſting days;
'Tis pain, 'tis danger, 'tis affronted death;
'Tis equal fate for all, and changing fortune;
That rear the mind to glory, that inſpire
The nobleſt virtues and the gentleſt manners.
Where ſhall I find, to teach thee theſe, Oreſtes,
Another Troy?

ORESTES.

How happy had I been!
To have beheld what I muſt only hear!
But I will hear it often, every day;

Will learn your ſtory, ſtudy your example;
Will try to mix your virtues with your blood,
And not diſgrace the laurels I inherit.
My boſom flutters with I know not what—
—Forgive me, Sir, I am too young to ſay it—
But ſomething here I feel, which bids me hope
That I ſhall not betray my father's honour.

AGAMEMNON.

Son of my ſoul!—Look here, my Clytemneſtra!
Look here and weep with tenderneſs and tranſport!
What is all taſteleſs luxury to this?
To theſe beſt joys, which holy love beſtows?
O Nature! parent Nature! thou alone
Art the true judge of what can make us happy!

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to the court.*

OFFICER.

Egiſthus, Sir, attends.

AGAMEMNON.

Go, bid him enter.
Retire, my Clytemneſtra, my dear children:
We ſoon ſhall meet again, till then farewell.

SCENE IV.

AGAMEMNON.

Obey me, features, for one ſupple moment:
You ſhall not long be tortur'd. Here, in courts,
We muſt not wear the ſoldier's honeſt face.
He little thinks I have him in the ſnare
Of Meliſander, whom, in my return,
I from that deſart iſland chanc'd to ſave,
To which the ruffian——

SCENE V.

AGAMEMNON, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS.

Health to Agamemnon!
And happineſs reſponſive to his glory!

AGAMEMNON.

Couſin, I greet you well.

EGISTHUS.

Forgive me, Sir.
You have ſurpriz'd us with this quick return:
For by that ſignal, whoſe illuſtrious flame
Rejoic'd all Greece, we did not hope your preſence
Theſe three days hence. Forgive, that, unprepar'd,
We only with that joy, that loyal tranſport,
Which ſwell each Grecian boſom, thus receive you.
And truly ſuch a burſt I have not ſeen
Of that beſt triumph. City, country, all,
Is in a gay triumphant tempeſt toſt.
I ſcarce could preſs along. The trumpet's voice
Is loſt in loud repeated ſhouts that raiſe
Your name to heaven. Ten thouſand eyes, below,
Ake to behold the conqueror of Troy.

AGAMEMNON.

The nobleſt praiſe that can ſalute my ear,
The ſweeteſt muſic, is my people's joy.
But ſure your tongue has done it ample juſtice;
Truſt me, you blazon a deſcription well.
I have not heard ſo much obliging ſpeech
Theſe many years.

ÆGISTHUS.

Miſconſtrue not my zeal:
On the full heart obedient language waits.
I feel ſo deep your glory, Agamemnon,
As mingles with my joy a ſort of paſſion,
That almoſt touches envy. O ye gods!
Has, while I liv'd, a war, the moſt renown'd
Which any age e'er ſaw, or ſhall again
Be ſeen; a war, whoſe never-dying fame
Will cover earth, and reach remoteſt time,
Has ſuch a war adorn'd my days, and I
Not ſhar'd its glory? Pining here, unknown,
In nameleſs peace—how have I loſt my life?

AGAMEMNON.

This ardor is the mode. But know, Egiſthus,
That ruling a free people well in peace,
Without or yielding or uſurping power;
Maintaining firm the honour of the laws,
Yet ſometimes ſoftening their too rigid doom,
As mercy may require; ſteering the ſtate,
Thro' factious ſtorms, or the more dangerous calms
Of peace, by long continuance grown corrupt;
Beſides the fair career which Fortune opens
To the mild glories of protected arts,
To bounty, to beneficence, to deeds
That give the gods themſelves their brighteſt beams:
Yes, know, that theſe are, in true glory equal,
If not ſuperior, to deluding conqueſt:
Nor leſs demand they conduct, courage, care,
And perſevering toil.

EGISTHUS.

Say, thankleſs toil,
Harſh and unpleaſing; that, inſtead of praiſe
And due reward, meets oftner ſcorn, reproach,
Fierce oppoſition to the cleareſt meaſures;
Injuſtice, baniſhment, or death itſelf:
Such is the nature of malignant man.
Not ſo the victor's meed: him all approve,
Him all admire.

AGAMEMNON.

Yet tho' a toilſome taſk,
Tho' an ungrateful labour oft to rule;
I not ſo hardly of mankind, Egiſthus,
Preſume to judge. Truth, wiſdom, courage, juſtice,
Beneficence, and for the public good
A conſtant tenor of well-laid deſigns,
Muſt ſtill be awful in the worſt of times,
Be amiable, dear; while worth, at laſt,
Will light up worth, and virtue kindle virtue.
You was however eas'd of half the toil,
By him I left to counſel Clytemneſtra,
By Meliſander.

EGISTHUS.

Would to Heaven I had!

AGAMEMNON.

You much amaze me.——Is not Meliſander
Wiſe, juſt, and faithful?

EGISTHUS.

Sir, I muſt confeſs
He wore a ſpecious maſk——

AGAMEMNON.

Beware, Egiſthus;
I know his ſtedfaſt worth, and will not bear
The fartheſt hint that ſtains the man I love.

EGISTHUS.

Then urg'd by truth, and in my own defence,
I boldly will aſſert him, Agamemnon,
To be more apt to trouble and embroil,
Than ſerve a ſtate. A certain ſtubborn virtue,
I would ſay affectation of blunt virtue,
Beneath whoſe outſide froth, fermenting lay
Pride, envy, faction, turbulence of ſoul,
And democrative views, in ſome ſort made him
A ſecret traitor, equally unfit
Or to obey or rule. But that I check'd
His early treaſons, here at your return,
You might have found your kingdom a republic.

AGAMEMNON.

O I ſhall loſe all patience!— [*Aſide.*
You do well,
To give your accuſation open ſpeech.
Meantime, remember you muſt fully prove it,
You muſt!—And he who Meliſander proves
The wretch you have deſcrib'd, proves man is vain,
And ſaps the broad foundations of all truſt.
I know he would not patiently look on,
And ſuffer ill deſigns to gather ſtrength,
Awaiting gentle ſeaſons; yes, I know,
He had a troubleſome old-faſhion'd way
Of ſhocking courtly ears with horrid truth.
He was no civil ruffian; none of thoſe,
Who lie with twiſted looks, betray with ſhrugs—
I wax too warm—But he was none of thoſe,

Is none of thoſe duſt-licking, reptile, cloſe,
Inſinuating, ſpeckled, ſmooth court-ſerpents,
That make it ſo unſafe, chiefly for kings,
To walk this weedy world—Pardon my heat—
I wander from the purpoſe—You, Egiſthus,
Muſt prove your charge, to Meliſander's face
Muſt prove it.

EGISTHUS.

Surely—Since the princely faith
Of your own blood you doubt——

AGAMEMNON.

Friendſhip and truth
Are more a-kin to me than blood.

EGISTHUS.

You ſhall,
You ſhall have proof; but to his face you cannot.

AGAMEMNON.

But to his face I will!—I cannot! why?

EGISTHUS.

He wanders far from hence, I know not where:
For when I found him an undoubted traitor,
Tho' he the heavieſt puniſhment deſerv'd;
Yet in regard to that eſteem, which, once,
You deign'd to bear him, baniſhment alone
Was all I did inflict.

AGAMEMNON.

I thank you, Sir—
O you are wondrous good!—But tell me, how,
How durſt you meddle in the ſphere aſſign'd
To Clytemneſtra? He was left to her;
To be her counſellor I left my friend,

Left Meliſander; left a man, whom long,
Whom well I knew; perhaps to check you, left him:
And you pretend, you!—But I will be calm—
Theſe paſſions in a king to his inferiors,
Who cannot anſwer equal, are not comely.
Forgive my tranſport—A more quiet hour
Shall ſift this matter to the bottom, ſhall
Do Meliſander or Egiſthus juſtice.

SCENE VI.

EGISTHUS.

Now go thy way, weak, open-hearted man,
Thus to declare the ruin thou intendeſt.
Go, rate thy Trojan ſlaves; and elſewhere practiſe
This inſolence of camps. Tame, as I ſeem,
Submiſſive, mild, and patient of thy threats;
Yet, ere to-morrow's ſun beholds Mycenæ,
My ſure-aim'd blow ſhall pierce thy ſwelling heart,
And cool this tyrant fever in thy veins.
Were not our blood, our kindred blood at variance,
And therefore burning with immortal hate;
Had not thy father Atreus, at a banquet,
A dreadful banquet! from whoſe ſight the ſun
Turn'd back eclips'd, ſerv'd—Monſtrous!—up to mine,
To his own brother, to the pale Thyeſtes,
His murder'd ſons: didſt thou not wear a crown
Then by thy father raviſh'd from our line,
Mycenæ's crown, which he unjuſtly ſeiz'd,
And added to his own, to that of Argos:
Had I not ſtain'd thy bed with Clytemneſtra:
Tho' ſafety did not urge, and ſelf-defence:

Yet this vile treatment, treatment fit for ſlaves;
Thanks to thy fury! this has fix'd thy doom.
Some fooliſh ſcruples, that ſtill hung about me,
Are by this friendly tempeſt blown away.——
But Clytemneſtra comes. How ſhall I calm
Her troubled mind? How bring her to my purpoſe?

SCENE VII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Here let me kneel, Egiſthus, graſp thy knees;
Here let me grow till my requeſt be granted.
Now is the very criſis of my fate.

EGISTHUS.

What ſight is this I ſee? Riſe, Clytemneſtra!
Thou faireſt, moſt majeſtic of thy ſex!
It miſbecomes thee much this ſuppliant poſture.
O there is nothing, nothing, ſure, which you
Need ſtoop to aſk! Speak, and command it, Madam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then let us henceforth be, as if this love
Had never been betwixt us.

EGISTHUS.

Ceaſe to love thee!
What wild demand! Impoſſible!—Even now,
Endear'd by danger, by diſtreſs endear'd,
I for thee feel a fonder pang, than e'er
I felt before.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No! theſe deluding words
Can charm no longer; their enchantment flies;
And in my breaſt the guilty paſſions jar,
Unkind, unjoyous, unharmonious all.
Ah me! from real happineſs we ſtray,
By vice bewilder'd; vice, which always leads,
However fair at firſt, to wilds of woe.

EGISTHUS.

Ah! Clytemneſtra! didſt thou love——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No more!
Seduce my ſoul no more! Here will I ſtop——
Beyond this line 'tis miſery, 'tis madneſs.
The furies flaſh their torches, vultures tear,
The mingled tortures of the damn'd await me.
Oh! if your paſſion be not merely ſelfiſh,
If the leaſt tenderneſs for me you feel,
Drive me no farther down the gulph of woe!
To happineſs I bid a laſt farewel;
I aſk not happineſs: no, that I leave
To innocence and virtue; peace, alone,
Some poor remains of peace is all I aſk,
Not to be greatly wretched, plung'd in horrors!
And yet, who knows, the heavenly ſpark, that ſleeps
Beneath theſe embers, yet may ſpread anew
Its chearful luſtre—All may yet be well——
For Agamemnon was ſo kind, ſo gentle,
With ſuch a holy tender flame he burn'd,
As might have kindled in a barbarous breaſt
Humanity and virtue.

EGISTHUS.

All pretence.
I gueſs his aim! I penetrate his purpoſe.
On you he laviſh'd fondneſs, while on me
He lowr'd deſtruction. Doubtleſs, with his ear
Some villain has been buſy; and he means
Firſt to divide us, then with greater eaſe,
To ruin both—And can you then be caught,
Caught with the common proſtituted ſpeeches,
That oft have ſicken'd on the glowing lip
Of many a Trojan ſlave? Chryſeïs had them;
Briſeïs too; and now Caſſandra, ſhe,
Who, more like a triumphant queen than captive,
Is every hour expected——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What Caſſandra?

EGISTHUS.

O it imports you little what Caſſandra!
Thus poorly tame you ne'er will want Caſſandras.
What is become of Clytemneſtra's ſpirit,
That ſhe can thus forget her high deſcent,
Forget her rank, her honour, nay forget
Her injuries?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But what Caſſandra, ſay?

EGISTHUS.

Why, Priam's daughter! the prophetic princeſs,
The proud, the young, the beautiful Caſſandra:
So vain of heart, ſhe dreamt Apollo lov'd her,
And, on her plighted faith to crown his love,
Beſtow'd the gift of prophecy; the gift

In her poſſeſſion, ſhe deceiv'd the god;
Whence he, provok'd, with this condition daſh'd it,
Of never gaining credit. So the tale,
The fable runs—Yet, on my ſoul, I think,
Did ſhe give out, ſhe would be queen of Argos,
She were indeed a propheteſs.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis well.
You mean it for an inſult this, you do.
What elſe could tempt you to deride me, Sir,
With ſuch extravagance?

EGISTHUS.

Miſtake me not,
I mean it, Madam, for a ſerious truth,
I mean it for a certainty, if thus
You droop, unnerv'd with theſe dejecting fears.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Caſſandra queen of Argos!

EGISTHUS.

Yes, of Argos;
While Clytemneſtra in a priſon pines;
Where ſhe may weep, and moralize at leiſure.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By Heavens! ſhe viſits firſt her father's ſhade.

EGISTHUS.

There ſhone your native ſelf. Let bright revenge,
I ſhould ſay juſtice, diſſipate theſe clouds,
Theſe melancholy whims of ill-judg'd virtue,
And ſhew you burning with your former luſtre.
Madam, our fates are blended: know, we ſtand
Or fall together. Shame, contempt, and ruin,

Or ſafety, love, and glory, is our choice.
And can we doubt a moment?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But Egiſthus—

EGISTHUS.

I know the purpoſe of thy pleading eye.
Of that hereafter—We ſhall meet again——
My preſence now is wanted in the city.
Fear nothing—Thou ſhalt know before we act,
Thou, for whoſe ſake alone I act and live!

ACT III. SCENE I.

ARCAS, MELISANDER.

ARCAS.

AND have I found my long-loſt friend again?
My Meliſander! But ſo chang'd your look,
So ſickly with a kind of thoughtful ſadneſs,
So ſunk each feature, by ſeven drooping years
Spent in that deſart iſle, as baffled quite
My wandering recollection.

MELISANDER.

True, dear Arcas:
For what a helpleſs creature, by himſelf,
Is the proud lord of this inferior world,
Vain feeble man! The commoners of nature,
Each wing that flits along the ſpacious ſky,
Is leſs dependant than their boaſting maſter.
Hail ſocial life! into thy pleaſing bounds
Again I come, to pay the common ſtock
My ſhare of ſervice: and, in glad return,
To taſte thy comforts, thy protected joys.

ARCAS.

O greatly welcome! you deſerve them well,
You well deſerve the ſocial life you poliſh.
Still on my thought your ſtrange delivery dwells.
By Agamemnon left to aid the queen
With faithful counſel, while he warr'd at Troy;
And thus by Agamemnon to be ſav'd,
Returning from that conqueſt! wondrous chance!
Or rather wondrous conduct of the gods!
By mortals, from their blindneſs, chance miſnam'd.

Mean time, inſtruct me, while the king repoſes,
How was you ſnatch'd away? and how, ſo long,
Could you this dreadful ſolitude ſupport?
I burn to know the whole.

MELISANDER.

'Tis thus, my friend.
While ſunk in unſuſpecting ſleep I lay,
Some midnight ruffians ruſh'd into my chamber,
Sent by Egiſthus, who my preſence deem'd
Obſtructive (ſo I ſolve it) to his views;
Black views I fear, as you perhaps may know.
Sudden they ſeiz'd, and muffled up in darkneſs,
Strait bore me to the ſea, whoſe inſtant prey
I did conclude myſelf, when firſt, around
The ſhip unmoor'd, I heard the chiding wave.
But theſe fell tools of cruel power, it ſeems,
Had orders in a deſart iſle to leave me;
There hopeleſs, helpleſs, comfortleſs, to prove
The utmoſt gall and bitterneſs of death.
Thus malice often overſhoots itſelf,
And ſome unguarded accident betrays
The man of blood.—Next night—a dreary night!
Caſt on the wildeſt of the Cyclad Iſles,
Where never human foot had mark'd the ſhore,
Theſe ruffians left me—Yet believe me, Arcas,
Such is the rooted love we bear mankind,
All ruffians as they were, I never heard
A ſound ſo diſmal as their parting oars.——
Then horrid ſilence follow'd, broke alone
By the low murmurs of the reſtleſs deep,
Mixt with the doubtful breeze, that now and then
Sigh'd thro' the mournful woods. Beneath a ſhade
I ſat me down, more heavily oppreſs'd,
More deſolate at heart, than e'er I felt

Before. When Philomela, o'er my head,
Began to tune her melancholy ſtrain,
As piteous of my woes; till, by degrees,
Compoſing ſleep on wounded nature ſhed
A kind but ſhort relief. At early morn,
Wak'd by the chaunt of birds, I look'd around
For uſual objects: objects found I none,
Except before me ſtretch'd the toiling main,
And rocks and woods, in ſavage view, behind.
Wrapt for a moment in amaz'd confuſion,
My thought turn'd giddy round; when, all at once,
To memory full my dire condition ruſh'd.

ARCAS.

But of each comfort, each convenience void,
How could you life ſuſtain? how fence againſt
Inclement ſkies?

MELISANDER.

A moſſy cave, that fac'd
The ſouthern ſea, and in whoſe deep receſs
Boil'd up a cryſtal fountain, was my home.
Herbs were my food, thoſe bleſſed ſtores of health!
Only when winter from my daily ſearch
Withdrew my verdant meal, I was oblig'd
In faithleſs ſnares to ſeize, which truly griev'd me,
My ſylvan friends; that ne'er till then had known,
And therefore dreaded leſs the tyrant man.
But theſe low hardſhips ſcarce deſerve regard:
The pangs, that ſharpeſt ſtung, were in my mind;
There deſolation reign'd; and there, cut off
From ſocial life, I felt a conſtant death.
And yet theſe pangs at laſt forgot to throb:
What cannot lenient gentle time perform?
I ate my lonely meal without a tear;

Nor ſigh'd to ſee the dreadful night deſcend.
In my own breaſt, a world within myſelf,
In ſtreams, in groves, in ſunny hill and ſhade;
In all that blooms with vegetable life,
Or joys with kindred animal ſenſation;
In the full-peopled round of azure heaven;
Whene'er I, ſtudious, look'd, I found companions.
But, chief, the muſes lent their ſoftning aid.
At their enchanting voice my ſorrows fled,
Or learn'd to pleaſe; while, thro' my troubled heart,
They breath'd the ſoul of harmony anew.
Thus of the great community of Nature
A denizen I liv'd; and oft, in hymns,
And rapturous thought, even with the gods convers'd,
That not diſdain ſometimes the walks of man.
So paſs'd the time, when, lo! within my call,
Arriv'd the ſhip, which hope had often promis'd—
The ſhip!—O it ſurpaſs'd my fondeſt dream,
E'er to imagine the gay ſhip that came!
As on the deck I Agamemnon ſaw,
All glorious with the ſpoils of conquer'd Troy;
Ye gods! what tranſport, what amazement ſeiz'd me!
What adoration of your wondrous ways!
Expreſſion ſinks beneath them.

ARCAS.

Sweet reward
Of manly patience! that, to fortune ſtill
Superior, ſcorns deſpair.

MELISANDER.

This theme, my friend,
Will better ſuit a leiſure hour; but now
The high concerns of life demand our care.

I have already to the king imparted
Suſpicions of Egiſthus, and remain
In this diſguiſe, not to alarm his guilt,
Till it more full appear, and proper ſteps
To puniſh his miſgovernment be taken.
If he has ill deſigns, you, Arcas, you
Muſt, while you ſeem'd regardleſs, have diſcern'd them.
Your calm but keen inſpection, not diſturb'd
By the vain flutter of ill-tim'd diſcourſe,
Muſt reach the very bottom of his purpoſe.
In you the king confides, of you demands,
As of his beſt-lov'd ſubject in Mycenæ,
The truth.

ARCAS.

O, I have precious truths in ſtore!
And that beſt treaſure will unlock before him.
Long has my ſilent obſervation trac'd
Egiſthus, thro' the doubling maze of treaſon;
But now his ill deſigns are too too plain,
To all Mycenæ plain; and who, indeed,
Who can have good ones that corrupts a people?
It was, however, hard, a bitter taſk!
To wink at public villany; to wipe
Each honeſt paſſion from my livid face,
To bind my hands, and ſeal my quivering lips,
While my heart burn'd with rage, and treaſur'd up
A ſtorm of indignation——

MELISANDER.

Give it way!
O 'tis a glorious luxury! Oppreſs'd,
For years, beneath a load of wicked power,
To heave it off indignant, and aſſert
The dear dear freedom of a virtuous mind.

Curſe on the coward or perfidious tongue,
That dares not, even to kings, avow the truth!
Let traitors wrap them in deluſive incenſe,
On flattery flattery heap, on falſehood falſehood:
Truth is the living liberal breath of heaven;
That ſweeps theſe fogs away, with all their vermin.
And, on my ſoul, I think that Agamemnon
Deſerves ſome touch of blame. To put the power,
The power of bleſſing or oppreſſing *millions*,
Of doing or great good or equal miſchief,
Even into doubtful hands, is worſe than careleſs.
Ye gods, avert the miſeries that hence
On him and on his family may fall!
But, ſee, the king.

SCENE II.

AGAMEMNON, MELISANDER, ARCAS.

AGAMEMNON.

Nay, Arcas to my boſom, [*Arcas kneeling.*
Come, let me proudly take a faithful heart!

ARCAS.

Thrice welcome, Sir, to Argos and Mycenæ!
To virtue welcome!

AGAMEMNON.

In my own dominions
I am a ſtranger, Arcas. Ten full years,
Or even one day, is abſence for a king,
Without ſome mighty reaſon, much too long.
For me a juſt and memorable war,
Whoſe actions future times perhaps may ſing,

My own, my brother's, and my people's honour,
With that of common Greece, muſt plead my pardon.
Now ſhall my cares attend the works of peace:
Calm deeds that glare not on the vulgar eye;
And yet it equal courage oft demands,
To quell injuſtice, riot, factious rage,
Dark-working blind cabal and bold diſorder,
As to confront the rigid face of war.
Then tell me, Arcas, for, till ſelf-inform'd,
I mean to ſee with your diſcerning eyes,
And ſure I am they never will miſlead me,
Have I much ſubject for this peaceful courage?
This fortitude of ſtate?

ARCAS.

Too much, my lord.
Would to the gods, our virtues, here at home,
Could anſwer your heroic deeds abroad!
You, doubtleſs, from the rugged ſchool of war,
Have brought ſound manly hearts, and generous ſpirits:
While we, alas! we rot in weedy peace,
In ſlothful riot, luxury, profuſion,
And every meanneſs to repair that waſte——
I ſee the noble blood, indignant, mount,
At this relation, to my ſovereign's cheek:
But as affairs now preſs, I were a traitor,
If with a ſparing tongue I ſpoke the truth.

AGAMEMNON.

Immortal gods! have I, theſe ten long years,
Suſtain'd a war at Troy; fill'd every day
With cares inceſſant, councils, dangers, toils,
To cheriſh villains in licentious eaſe?
Have I thus ſquander'd vile, on Phrygian plains,

The braveſt blood of Greece to ſhelter ſuch;
And to aſſert their honour who have none?
But what can this perfidious, this Egiſthus,
What can he, ſay, by ſuch looſe rule propoſe?
Is it his native bent? or does he puſh
Some dark deſign, by theſe deteſted means?

ARCAS.

There is no vice a ſtranger to his heart,
Conceal'd beneath refin'd diſſimulation;
Diſſimulation, that on you yourſelf
Impos'd. Meantime, Sir, his outrageous views
Invade the throne of Argos and Mycenæ.

AGAMEMNON.

Said you the throne of Argos and Mycenæ?
Already have I loſt my nobleſt throne,
If he has robb'd me of my people's virtue;
'Tis but vain pomp, a tyrant's toy, the other.
And dares he bear a giddy look ſo high,
As to my throne? The villain! ſure he dares not!

ARCAS.

Nay, more, my lord—He ſcales the dazzling height,
And almoſt graſps with impious hands your ſceptre.

AGAMEMNON.

To touch it is perdition!—What! Egiſthus!
Egiſthus ſeize my throne!

ARCAS.

So means the traitor.

AGAMEMNON.

That creature of my power! that inſect! rais'd
By the warm beams of my miſtaken bounty!
Whom, when my father's vengeance raz'd his race,

I ſav'd, train'd up, with favours, honours heap'd;
And truſted in his hands at laſt a jewel,
Too precious for the faithleſs heart of man—
O groſs groſs blindneſs!—Half my kingly power!
Ay, there breaks out his father's treacherous blood!
There, there, too late, I find the baſe Thyeſtes!
Forgive me, Atreus! Oh my royal father!
Forgive my truſting thus the ſeed of him,
Of an abhorr'd, an execrable brother,
Who even profan'd thy bed—But, ere yon orb
Shall from the purpled ocean riſe again,
Oh injur'd Atreus! by thy ſacred ſhade
I ſwear, to make for this a full atonement.
Is then this people, Arcas, grown ſo vile,
So very vile, that he dares entertain
The ſmalleſt hope to rival me in empire?
I like not vaunting—But, ungrateful people!
Can you prefer a nameleſs thing to me?
Am I not rough with ſcars on your account?
And for the careful love I always bore you,
Your father nam'd? And yet prefer to me,
One who ne'er ſaw the glorious front of war,
For nothing famous but corrupting peace,
And whoſe ſole merit was my ill-judg'd favour?
Can you?—Away!—Diſhonour ſtains the thought!
How ſhould this be?

ARCAS.

Not many, Sir, ſtand fix'd
On the deep principles of reaſon'd virtue,
Whom time nor ſteals, nor paſſion bears away.
Mankind, in general, float along the ſtream
Of cuſtom, good or bad; and oft the mind
To that familiar grows, by gradual uſe
And ſtill encroaching vice, whoſe firſt regard

Gave horror. Hence ten looſely-govern'd years
Have wrought ſuch ſtrange events, that you no more
Behold your ancient Argos and Mycenæ.
Theſe cities now with ſlaves and villains ſwarm.
At firſt, Egiſthus, popular and fair,
All ſmiles and ſoftneſs, as if each man's friend,
By hidden ways proceeded, mining virtue:
He pride, he pomp, he luxury diffus'd;
He taught them wants, beyond their private means:
And ſtrait, in bounty's pleaſing chains involv'd,
They grew his ſlaves. Who cannot live on little,
Or as his various fortunes ſhall permit,
Stands in the market ready to be ſold.

AGAMEMNON.

O damn'd deteſted traffic!—But proceed.

ARCAS.

While the luxurious fever thus increas'd,
Still, in proportion as it gather'd rage,
He lent it fewel: and, more bold, diſclos'd
His noon-day treaſon. Murmurs went about,
And ſpread at laſt into the common talk,
That you was proud, ſevere, beneath the notion
Of holding firm the helm of ſtate, a tyrant;
That in vain wars, which nought imported them,
You ſpent their treaſure, ſhed their nobleſt blood;
And that, Troy conquer'd once, to her rich plains
You meant from Argos to tranſplant your empire.
Mean time, in private, all, whom wild debauch
Has ſet adrift from every human tie;
Whom riot, want, and conſcious guilt inflame,
Holding the gods and virtue in contempt,
Amidſt their bowls; ſuch are his boſom-friends:
And join'd to them, a meaner ruffian band,

Of villains bold in crimes, whoſe trade is murder,
Hang in black clouds around him; whence, I fear,
A ſudden tempeſt is prepar'd to burſt.
This, Sir, from duty and a faithful zeal,
I plain unfold: nor on my word, alone,
Believe theſe accuſations; clear as day,
I for them will produce the ſtrongeſt proof.

AGAMEMNON.

I thank thee, Arcas. Truth, tho' ſometimes clad
In painful luſtre, yet is always welcome,
Dear as the light that ſhews the lurking rock:
'Tis the fair ſtar that, ne'er into the main
Deſcending, leads us ſafe thro' ſtormy life——
Gods! how it tears me from each calmer thought!
To think this traitor, that this double traitor,
This traitor to myſelf and to my people,
Should by ſuch ſneaking, ſuch unmanly ways,
Thus filch away my crown!——
Why ſtand I chafing here? One timely deed
Is worth ten thouſand words—Come then, my friends,
Come and behold me ſeize amidſt his guards,
His coward guards—Guilt ever was a coward—
This rival-king, and with him crown my triumph.
Till then Troy ſmokes in vain, and Agamemnon
Cannot be ſaid to conquer.

MELISANDER.

Sir, beware——

AGAMEMNON.

Of what beware? Where am I, Meliſander?
Am I not in Mycenæ? in my palace?
Are not theſe crowds, that ſtream along the ſtreets,
My ſubjects all? Of what ſhould I beware?

Not ſeize a traitor in my own dominions!
Yes, I will ſeize him, Meliſander,—will!

MELISANDER.

What grace to kings ſuch generous ardor gives!
But tho' brave deeds be warm at firſt conceiv'd,
Let the beſt purpoſe cool, nor miſs your blow.
More firm and ſure the hand of courage ſtrikes,
When it obeys the watchful eye of caution.
You hear from Arcas, Sir, what ruffian bands,
What ſecret deaths, what daggers lurk around him;
Be cautious then; for virtue's, glory's ſake!
And, when you ſtrike, ſtrike home.

AGAMEMNON.

O for thoſe Greeks!
That this rude day are toſſing on the ſeas;
Thoſe hardy Greeks, whom ten years war has ſteel'd;
With toils, with dangers, and with death familiar:
Then ſhould you ſee what chaff before the wind
Are theſe weak ſons of ſoft enfeebling peace,
Theſe wretches, only bold where unreſiſted.

MELISANDER.

But ſince, my lord, you cannot now exert
This nobler force, let prudence take its place.
Have patience only, till you ſafely can,
And ſurely, ſeize him.

AGAMEMNON.

Well, till then I will.
And, tho' not made of patient mold, in this
I will have patience, will, ſome tedious hours,
Repreſs my vengeance——— [*Pauſing.*
Yes, I like the thought—
He may be ſeiz'd this evening at the banquet,

Be there ſurpriz'd with eaſe—and ſhall!—
For, by th' eternal gods that rule mankind!
The ſleep of death alone ſhall ſeal theſe eyes,
While ſuch a wretch holds power in my dominions.
Oh Clytemneſtra! to the public, now,
Succeeds the private pang.—At thought of thee,
New rage, new vengeance ſhake my inmoſt ſoul!
Was my belov'd, my queen, my Clytemneſtra,
So long abandon'd in a villain's power,
Who knows, it ſeems, no limits, owns no laws,
Save thoſe one vice impoſes on another?
And now the ſecret cauſe, I fear, is plain,
Of that unuſual damp, that ſtrange dejection,
Which clouded her at meeting. Still the more
I pour'd my fondneſs, ſtill the more diſtreſs'd
She ſeem'd; and, turning from my tender gaze,
The copious ſhower ſtole down her troubled cheek;
As if ſhe pity'd thoſe my blind endearments,
And in her breaſt ſome horrid ſecret ſwell'd—
Should it be ſo—Confuſion!—Can I ſtoop
Even to ſuppoſe it!—How from ſlight miſtakes
Great evils ſpring! But the moſt fruitful ſource
Of every evil—O that I, in thunder,
Could ſound it o'er the liſtning earth to kings—
Is delegating power to wicked hands.

MELISANDER.

My lord, let no ſuſpicions of the queen
E'er taint your boſom: if I judge aright——

AGAMEMNON.

No, Meliſander, no; I am not jealous;
In me that paſſion and contempt were one;
No, 'tis her ſituation gives me horror,
Her dreadful ſituation!—But of this

Enough.——Then tell me, Arcas, tell me truly;
Are there a few, ſay, do there yet remain
A faithful few! to ſave the ſinking ſtate?
Can you, ere night, collect an honeſt band,
A band of ſuch as worthy are to reſcue
Their king and country from impending fate?
Ah! little thought I, that amidſt my ſubjects,
Emboſom'd ſweet in peace, I, like a tyrant,
Should e'er have needed guards.

ARCAS.

Yes, Sir, I know
A band of generous youths, whom native virtue,
Unbroken yet by avarice or profuſion,
Fits for our purpoſe: Theſe I can collect——

AGAMEMNON.

About it quickly, Arcas; loſe no time:
Go, bring me to the banquet thoſe brave youths:
I long for their acquaintance. Till that hour,
Domeſtic cares and joys demand my preſence:
The father's heart now bears me to my children.
Farewel! My all depends upon your conduct.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

AGAMEMNON, MELISANDER.

AGAMEMNON.

DOMESTIC pleaſures ſpread their charms in vain—
O for the hour of vengeance! I, till then,
But ſtalk about, the ſhadow of a king.
Heard you from Arcas aught?

MELISANDER.

Be patient, Sir.
As yet the time permits not his return.
Arcas is zealous, ardent in your ſervice,
And will not fail his duty.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to the Court.*

OFFICER.

Sir, Caſſandra
Is juſt arriv'd.

AGAMEMNON.

Conduct the princeſs hither.
This Priam's faireſt daughter, Meliſander,
Is a young princeſs of engaging beauty,
Rais'd by diſtreſs, of noble ſenſe and ſpirit;
But, by poetic viſions led aſtray,
She dreamt Apollo lov'd her, and the gift
Of prophecy beſtow'd, to gain her promiſe:
The gift once her's, the chaſtely-faithleſs maid
Deceiv'd the god; who therefore, in revenge,
Since he could not recal it, made it uſeleſs,
For ever doom'd to meet with diſregard.

E'er-ſince the lovely viſionary raves
With dignity; foretels the fate of nations;
And, judging of the future from the paſt,
Has oft been wondrous happy in her gueſſes.
Some ſtrange, ſome recent inſtances of this,
Confirm her in her venerable madneſs.

MELISANDER.

Be not too raſh in judging, Agamemnon;
For we, blind mortals, but a little know
Of boundleſs Nature—Hark! the princeſs comes;
I hear her voice, I hear the voice of ſorrow.

SCENE II.

AGAMEMNON, MELISANDER, CASSANDRA, *attended by* Trojan *Captives.*

CASSANDRA *entering.*

O hoſtile roofs! O Ilium! O my country!

AGAMEMNON.

I cannot blame your grief, unhappy princeſs,
But, if it can relieve you, here be ſure
Of an aſylum, ſafe as Priam's palace.

CASSANDRA.

O ſweet abode! O palace of my fathers!
My bleeding heart melts while I think of thee;
Think of the days of innocence and joy,
That ſhone upon me there. How chang'd art thou!
Ah! what a ſcene, when I beheld thee laſt!
Rage, blood, and flames, and ſhrieks of murder round me!
The ſword of Pyrrhus, and a feeble father!
Where was your Hector then? Where all his ſons?

O Priam's numerous race! what are you now
Become? Ah me, the deſolating gods
Have laid their hands, their iron hands, upon us.

AGAMEMNON.

From paſt misfortunes, princeſs, turn your eye—

CASSANDRA.

'Tis true, the future may full well ſuffice.
Th' avenging ſiſters trace my footſteps ſtill,
The hunters ſtill purſue the trembling doe.
Where am I?—Gods!—Black heavy drops of blood
Run down the guilty walls—With the dun ſhades
Of night aſcending, lo! ſucceſſive troops
Of Trojan ghoſts are flocking to the banquet:
Permitted by th' infernal gods, they come,
To feaſt them with the horrors of this night,
To ſnuff the blood of victims—Ha! the car,
The gay triumphal car, is turn'd, at once,
Into a mournful bier, that nods along,
Solemn and ſlow—Yes, Troy ſhall be aveng'd:
I ſhall the vengeance ſee; and yet not ſee
Thy light, returning Phœbus.

AGAMEMNON.

Fair Caſſandra,
Indulge no more theſe melancholy views,
Theſe viſions form'd by gloomy-minded grief.
We will each art, each tender art employ,
To ſooth your ſorrows, to reſtore your peace.
You come not to the proud unfeeling race
Of yeſterday: we know the turns of fortune;
Have drunk the cup, the wholeſome cup of ſufferings,
That not inflames but moderates the mind.
Then fear not, princeſs; let me call you daughter!

Your treatment ſhall be ſuch as well becomes
The dignity of woe, becomes the great,
The fair unhappy. Nought ſhall touch your honour.
I know, I feel your beauty: but here dwell
The gods of hoſpitality and faith;
The hymeneal powers are honour'd here.
Yes, I will ſhield thee, equal with Electra,
With my lov'd daughter in thy friendſhip bleſt.

CASSANDRA.

In ſpite of ſwelling tears that choak the way,
Of bitter tears by big remembrance ſhed,
I own thy goodneſs, thank thee, Agamemnon.
Mean time, in vain are all thy generous cares,
On my account. The gods of death will, ſoon,
Extend o'er me their all-protecting wing,
I ſhall not long, I ſhall not want protection;
But, who, devoted prince, will give it thee?
Even while we talk the ſecret wheels are turning,
That lift the vile, and lay the mighty low.
I pity thee, the houſe of Pelops pity:
Forgive me, Troy: I pity thy deſtroyers.

Enter an OFFICER.

OFFICER.

A meſſenger from Arcas, Sir——

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis well.
To my apartment lead him—you mean-while
[*To* Meliſander.
Attend the princeſs; grace her with ſuch honours,
As ſuits her to receive, and me to give.

SCENE III.

CASSANDRA, CHORUS *of* Trojan *Captives*, MELISANDER.

MELISANDER.

Fair princeſs, ſtop theſe tears. Exert that beſt,
That nobleſt virtue, which can maſter fortune,
An equal mind.

CASSANDRA.

Not for myſelf I weep!——
But, oh my dear companions! How for you
My boſom yearns!

CHORUS.

We have together liv'd!
Together let us die!

CASSANDRA.

Together liv'd!
At this ten thouſand images awake;
Ten thouſand little tenderneſſes throb.

CHORUS.

O days of youth! O careleſs days! Untaught
To weep, if love ſhed not the pleaſing tear.

CASSANDRA.

O woods! O fountains! O delightful meads!
That lent us flowers, the prime of blooming May,
To deck our treſſes.

CHORUS.

O the yellow banks
Of fair Scamander! in whoſe ſilver ſtream
We us'd to bathe, beneath the ſecret ſhade.

CASSANDRA.

O chearful Ida's airy ſummits! where
The gods delight to dwell.

CHORUS.

O ſilent Troy!
Whoſe ſtreets have often echo'd with our ſong.

CASSANDRA.

O the loſt labours of a ruin'd people!
O country! freedom! friends! relations! All,
That gives or taſte or dignity to life,
All, all is gone, beyond recovery gone!

CHORUS.

Then let us die!

CASSANDRA.

For me, the hunted hart
More fervent pants not for the cooling ſtream,
Than I to wrap me in the quiet ſhades
Of death. But ah! my helpleſs friends, for you
I feel its keeneſt anguiſh.

CHORUS.

Not for us,
Feel not for us. What comfort have we left?
What hope, what wiſh in life?—One healing pang,
And then we weep no more.

CASSANDRA.

Refreſhing thought!
And then from bondage, pain, from every ill,
For ever free, we meet our friends again;
Our parents, brothers, ſiſters, lovers meet.

CHORUS.

Then let us die! and ſudden be the blow!

CASSANDRA.

The gods aſſent.—Behold the happy ſhore!
But, ah! there lies a ſtormy ſea betwixt!

MELISANDER.

So ſings the plaining nightingale her woes.

CASSANDRA.

Ah, far unlike the nightingale!—She ſings,
Unceaſing, thro' the balmy nights of May;
She ſings from love and joy, while we, alas!—

MELISANDER.

Behold the queen.—Deep-wrapt in thought ſhe ſeems——

CASSANDRA.

O direful muſings!—Lead us from her preſence.

SCENE IV.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sweet peace of mind! whence pleaſure bórrows taſte,
Daughter of virtue! whither art thou fled?
To what calm cottage, to what blameleſs ſhade,
Far from theſe guilty walls? O walls! O race!
To horrors doom'd!—Before me gathers faſt
A deepning gloom, with unknown terrors big.—
Not quite unknown.—Gods! what a dreadful hint
Flaſh'd from Egiſthus, when I ſaw him laſt!
And to what deſperate actions cannot ſafety,
Ambition, love, and vengeance drive the ſoul!—
Diſtraction lies that way—yet, how eſcape?
Shame urges on behind, unpitying ſhame,
That worſt of furies, whoſe fell aſpect frights

Each tender feeling from the human breaſt.
Goodneſs itſelf even turns in me to gall,
And only ſerves to heighten my deſpair.
How kind was Agamemnon! generous! fond!
How more than uſual mild! As if, on purpoſe,
To give theſe tortures their ſevereſt ſting.
Happy! compar'd to this tormented ſtate,
Where honour only lives with inward laſh,
To puniſh guilt, happy the harden'd wretch,
Who feels no conſcience, and who fears no crime!—
Oh horrid! horrid! Oh flagitious thought!
How is it with the mind that can endure
A thought ſo dire!—My ſole remaining hope
Is death, kind death, that amiable ſleep
Which wakes no more,—at leaſt to mortal care—
But then the dark Hereafter that may come.—
There is no anchor that againſt this ſtorm,
This mighty ſea of doubts and fears, can hold.
Hopeleſs, I drive.—One thought deſtroys another.—
This ſtranger too!—Should it be Meliſander—
Is there a fear, however idle, wild,
And even almoſt impoſſible, which guilt,
The feeble-hearted guilt not entertains?——
I order'd his attendance.—See, he comes.

SCENE V.

CLYTEMNESTRA, MELISANDER.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Stranger, are you not he, whom Agamemnon,
By an amazing chance, in his return,
Sav'd from a deſart iſle?

MELISANDER.

Madam, the ſame.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I much admire your fortunate deliverance,
And wiſh to hear your ſtory: why there left,
And how ſuſtain'd. Indulge me with it, ſtranger.

MELISANDER.

Madam, I come this moment from the king,
Charg'd with a matter which requires diſpatch:
But, that tranſacted once, without delay,
I will attend your orders.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then, it ſeems,
You are not quite a ſtranger in Mycenæ.
What is your country?

MELISANDER.

Greece.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What part of Greece?

MELISANDER.

At Athens I was born.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But in Mycenæ,
Have you not in Mycenæ been before?

MELISANDER.

There are not, Madam, many parts of Greece
To me unknown.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Why thus avoid my queſtion?—
Have you been here before?

MELISANDER.

Madam, I have.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Here in this palace?—Ha! why ſtand you ſilent?
You keep your eyes unmov'd upon the ground.
What ſhould this mean? Beneath that rough diſguiſe
There lurks, methinks, a form, which ſomewhere I
Have ſeen.

MELISANDER.

The dream of fancy, that, the more
It is indulg'd, perplexes ſtill the more.
I tarry here too long; the king's commands
Admit of no delay.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis ſo! 'tis ſo!
Air, features, manner, voice, this ſtudy'd haſte,
The ſhifts of one unpractis'd in deceit,
All, all conſpire—One image wakes another,
And thick they flaſh upon me!

MELISANDER.

You grow pale,
You tremble, Madam; that miſtake, I find,
Concerning me turns wilder and diſturbs you.
Let me retire——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A moment—ſtay——

MELISANDER.

In vain,
I find it is in vain to wrap me longer
In theſe evaſions.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Meliſander!

MELISANDER.

Madam——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And can it be? Behold I then the man,
Whom I ſo long have number'd with the dead?
Almighty gods! Behold I Meliſander?
But, ah! how chang'd! how darken'd with ſuſpicion!
Yes, I am deem'd the author of his woes.

MELISANDER.

Madam, forgive——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Why elſe from me conceal
Your wiſh'd return—I plainly am diſtruſted—
By Agamemnon too—It was unkind,
Unjuſt, unfriendly, ſhocks me, Meliſander.

MELISANDER.

Indeed you wrong me, Madam, wrong me much,
To judge me apt or to conceive or ſpread
Diſtruſt. I would have periſh'd by myſelf,
Unknown, unwept, in helpleſs ſolitude,
Rather than here return to this full world,
To ſet my miſtreſs and her lord at variance.
O think me not a buſy peace-deſtroyer!
Accurſed is the wretch, to ſocial life
The moſt inhuman foe, who in the nice,
The tender ſcenes of life, dares raſhly meddle,
And ſow diviſion between friends and lovers.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The generous heart is ever ſlow to blame,
But, Meliſander, not to me were owing,

Not in the leaſt to me, thoſe cruel woes,
This worſe than death, which you ſo long have ſuffer'd.
Inſtead of that, your fate, how, whither gone,
If carry'd off, or ſecretly deſtroy'd,
Was all a mournful myſtery to me,
Dark as the night on which you diſappear'd.
Did you but know, here in my ſecret ſoul,
What undiſſembled pangs your abſence rouz'd,
What I have felt for you, and for myſelf;
In loſing ſuch a wiſe and faithful friend;
Knew you but theſe, O knew you, Meliſander,
How your diſaſter has been truly mine,
You never could ſuſpect me.

MELISANDER.

Witneſs Heav'n!
I never did—Your heart I know diſdains
A thought that looks like cruelty or fraud.
From the firſt moment that his ruffians ſeiz'd me,
I had no doubt, I knew it was Egiſthus.
Some time before I mark'd the riſing ſtorm,
And meant to warn you, but it ſudden burſt,
And bore me far away, far from all means,
Even from all hope of lending you aſſiſtance.
Ay! there I ſuffer'd moſt. My fears for you,
At once by guile and violence beſet,
Took off the point of my own proper woes.
But when your awful virtues ſtruck my thought,
Your wiſdom, ſpirit, reſolution, truth;
That dread effulgence of the ſpotleſs ſoul,
Which ſmites the hardeſt villain into ſhame;
My fears appear'd impertinent and vain.
Yet, doubtleſs, Madam, you have had occaſion
For a firm ruling hand and watchful eye,

For every virtue; and I truly joy,
That Agamemnon finds at his return
Egiſthus by your conduct thus reſtrain'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By Heavens! he tries me.—O ſuſpicious guilt!
[*Aſide.*
Your words are friendly, but your deeds are doubtful,
No, Meliſander, friendſhip with diſtruſt
Can never dwell. And that I am diſtruſted
To me is certain—In a matter too,
That much concern'd my peace, concern'd my honour.
For did you even aſcribe your woes to me,
You could not manage with more diſtant caution.

MELISANDER.

Whence is it that the noble Clytemneſtra,
Who us'd to ſhine in a ſuperior ſphere
Of fair ſerenity and candid peace,
Should to theſe doubts deſcend, theſe dark ſuſpicions?
For me, I here atteſt the gods, my ſoul
Ne'er knew a thought, that ſwell'd not with eſteem,
With love, and veneration of your virtues.
And for the king, no young enraptur'd lover,
In all the firſt effuſions of his ſoul,
New to the mighty charm: no friend, who meets,
After long years of dark and ſilent abſence,
His happy friend again, feels livelier joy,
Than Agamemnon feels, while his glad tongue
Runs out in endleſs praiſe of Clytemneſtra—
But I muſt wait his orders.——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Do your duty.
I too muſt go, muſt to Egiſthus ſtrait [*Aſide.*
Impart this dreadful news.

SCENE VI.

MELISANDER *alone.*

She went abruptly——
And as we talk'd, methought, ſtrange paſſions ſhook
Her inward frame, and darken'd every feature.
Behold the black, the guilt-concealing night,
Faſt cloſes round. Wide, thro' this ample palace,
The lamps begin to ſhine. The tempeſt falls;
The weary winds ſink, breathleſs. But, who knows,
What fiercer tempeſt yet may ſhake this night.
Soul-chearing Phœbus, with thy ſacred beams
O quickly come, and chaſe theſe ſullen ſhadows.

ACT V. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS.

AH Clytemneſtra! what a change is here!
And muſt I then thus ſteal an interview?
Are we alone?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

You fright me with that queſtion:
You look aſtoniſh'd.

EGISTHUS.

On the brink of ruin
We, tottering, ſtand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

That is no news to me.

EGISTHUS.

But——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What?

EGISTHUS.

We are diſcover'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! diſcover'd!

EGISTHUS.

Yes, certainly diſcover'd. Arcas now,
By Agamemnon's orders, in the city

Collects a band, to ſeize me at the banquet,
A ſhort hour hence. And my accuſers, Madam,
You may be well aſſur'd are not your friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis plain!—'tis plain!—The parting fogs diſperſe:
And now the doubtful ſcene ſtands all reveal'd—
Who could have thought they ſhould diſſemble thus?
But I can tell you more.

EGISTHUS.

What, Madam? ſpeak;
For danger preſſes on us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Saw you him,
This ſeeming ſtranger, ſav'd by Agamemnon?

EGISTHUS.

Arcas and he to-day, my friends inform me,
Were buſy with the king; and doubtleſs, then,
It was concerted that I ſhould be ſeiz'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah! did you know, Egiſthus, who he is!——

EGISTHUS.

Who?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Meliſander.

EGISTHUS.

Gods! and does he live?
For my confuſion ſav'd! O groſs, groſs folly!
To do an action of that kind by halves.
Had he been ſilent duſt—To pleaſe you, Madam,
From a falſe tenderneſs for you, he lives——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A mighty merit! glorious boaſt indeed!
Hear him, ye gracious gentle powers of love!
From tenderneſs for me, he did not murder
A worthy blameleſs man, who never hurt him;
He murder'd not my friend, my faithful friend.
Ah! 'tis ſuch tenderneſs, that makes me wretched;
Such tenderneſs, that ſtill in blacker guilt,
In the laſt depth of miſery will plunge me.

EGISTHUS.

It is not, Madam, now a time for this.
Think of our ſituation: cloſe beſet
By all thoſe ills which mortals moſt abhor,
Whom have we to confide in but each other?
And this ſad meeting is perhaps our laſt.
Concord alone, and vigorous meaſures, can
Prevent our ruin—But from Meliſander,
What did you learn? Are you yourſelf ſuſpected?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I cannot find I am:—And yet I muſt.

EGISTHUS.

But as for me, my ruin is no ſecret.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis true, ſome dark attempt goes on againſt you.

EGISTHUS.

Then have I rightly done.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What have you done?

EGISTHUS.

What prudence, juſtice, love, and vengeance, all
Demand——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Immortal Powers! you have not?—

EGISTHUS.

No:
But muſt, and will—What elſe can you propoſe?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, any thing beſides! immediate flight,
Eternal abſence, death!——

EGISTHUS.

Let others die!
Let the proud, faithleſs, falſe, injurious tyrant;
The hero glorious in his daughter's murder;
The ſcourge of Greece, who has, from wild ambition,
Shed ſo much blood—let Agamemnon die!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh heavens and earth! you ſhock me to diſtraction!
I have, Egiſthus, hitherto avoided
This dreadful point, ſtill hoping you might drop
Your horrid reſolution: now I tell you,
Before the liſtening gods, I plainly tell you,
That Agamemnon ſhall not fall unwarn'd:
You ſhall not riſe by me into his throne;
I will not be the tool of your ambition;
Will not be wretched, infamous for ever,
The bluſh of women, the diſgrace of nature!
That you may gain your execrable views,
Maſk'd under ſmooth pretences.—I am guilty;

Alas, I am—But think not, therefore, tyrant!
To give me law. There are degrees in guilt;
And I have ſtill my reaſon left, have left
Some reſolution, ſome remains of virtue:
Yes, I dare die; and who dares die, Egiſthus,
Needs not be driven to villanous extremes!
Mark me, inſulting man!—My certain cure
Of every woe, my cordial draught is ready;
And if you do not promiſe me, here ſwear
To drop your fell deſigns on Agamemnon,
To quit this palace—You may ſtill eſcape—
And never ſee me more; I go, I go,
This moment to diſcover all and die!

EGISTHUS.

What! Clytemneſtra!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nothing ſhall diſſuade me.
I will not argue more—Say, only ſay,
Muſt I betake me to this cruel refuge?
This dire neceſſity?

EGISTHUS.

Permit me, Madam;
Hear me but once, and then purſue your purpoſe.
Suppoſe us guilty, what you will;—yet, Madam,
Shall we acknowledge and proclaim that guilt?
Shall we, by patient waiting for our doom,
By pitiful neglect of ſelf-defence,
Unheard-of meanneſs! ſtamp it into ſhame?
No; let us wipe it out with bold ſucceſs.
It is ſucceſs that colours all in life:
Succeſs makes fools admir'd, makes villains honeſt;
All the proud virtue of this vaunting world
Fawns on ſucceſs, and power, howe'er acquir'd.

If then, ſuppoſing guilt, it were a meanneſs
To ſtoop to ſhame, can words expreſs the madneſs
Of ſtopping ſhort, with infamy and ruin,
When juſtice, love and vengeance urge to glory?
Inſtead of being deem'd a generous queen,
The brave avenger of her ſex's honour,
Fam'd for her ſpirit, for her juſt reſentment;
Who greatly puniſh'd a perfidious huſband,
A cruel tyrant; one, who from his bed,
His throne, propos'd, with open ſhame, to turn her,
And to her place to take his country's foe,
To take a Trojan captive, proud Caſſandra:
Inſtead of ſuch renown, can Clytemneſtra—
Forgive the doubt—Can ſhe ſubmit to paſs,
Thro' future times, for an abandon'd woman?
A feeble, ſpiritleſs, abandon'd woman!—
Nay, Madam, hear the truth, what now I tell you
Muſt, in a little ſcanty hour, take place;
In a few moments, you muſt be the firſt
Or laſt of women; be the public ſcorn,
Or admiration of approving Greece—
You know you muſt—be Agamemnon's ſlave,
Caſſandra's ſlave, or nobly puniſh both,
And reign with me in happineſs and glory.

Conſult your heart; can you reſolve on ſhame?
On voluntary ſhame? That only ill
The generous fear, which kills the ſoul itſelf.
Were thóſe fair features, full of lovely grandeur,
Form'd for confuſion? That majeſtic front,
To be bow'd down with infamy and vileneſs?
Ah! can you bear contempt? The venom'd tongue
Of thoſe whom ruin pleaſes? The keen ſneer,
The lewd reproaches of the raſcal herd;
Who, for the ſelf-ſame actions, if ſucceſsful,

Would be as groſsly laviſh in your praiſe?—
To ſum up all in one—Can you ſupport
The ſcornful glances, the malignant joy,
Or more deteſted pity of a rival?
Of a triumphant rival?—No; you cannot.
That conſcious worth, which kindles in your eye,
Tells me you cannot.—
But in vain diſputes
No more to ſquander theſe important moments:
Know, that I have not, to the frail deciſion
Of wav'ring fear and female weakneſs, left
Our freedom, ſafety, happineſs and honour.
Even in your own deſpite you ſhall be ſav'd.
And could you be ſo loſt to reaſon, wild,
To do what woman never did before,
What ſhocks humanity, accuſe yourſelf;
You only court diſhonour to no purpoſe:
For Agamemnon now cannot eſcape;
I am already maſter of this palace;
All is prepar'd, my people all are fix'd,
All properly diſpos'd; and here I ſwear,
By ſacred juſtice, glory, love, and vengeance!
He dies!—dies in the bath, before the banquet!—
And with him dies Caſſandra, ſhe, who dares,
In her preſumptuous thought, uſurp thy honours.
She weeps!—O my ador'd! my Clytemneſtra!
Forgive this barbarous neceſſary truth!
Did I not love thee, love thee more than empire,
Than life and glory, would I thus diſcloſe
Theſe dangerous ſecrets? Could I not have veil'd,
And, with more certain caution, gain'd my purpoſe?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, that you had, Egiſthus! then, alas!
I ſhould have fondly thought myſelf leſs guilty.

ÆGISTHUS.

I loſe myſelf in ſoftneſs, while the time,
With danger big, demands intrepid deeds.
Wipe off theſe tears—When next we meet again,
All will be well.

SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah! when we meet again!—
I ſtand, at laſt, convinc'd, and muſt diſſemble—
Yet how diſſemble? Painted, in my face,
Are the full horrors of this bloody deed.——
But who are theſe approaching?—Ha!—Caſſandra!
How fair ſhe ſeems! how lovely! hateful charms!
That well may rival mine, decay'd, and ſunk
By guilt and ſorrow—She poſſeſs my bed!
Poſſeſs my ſceptre!—This reſtores my ſpirit;——
I am abus'd! too patient!—Periſh all!
Periſh myſelf, Egiſthus, Agamemnon!
So this proud rival, this Caſſandra periſh!

SCENE III.

CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives*, MELISANDER.

MELISANDER.

Daughters of Ilium! By the king's command,
I come to aſk your preſence at the banquet.
Till then allow me to partake your woes:
I have a reverence for them. I myſelf,
Thanks to the gracious gods! have known misfortune;

I am with grief acquainted; therefore can
For others feel. Sweet ſource of every virtue,
O ſacred Sorrow! He who knows not thee,
Knows not the beſt emotions of the heart,
Thoſe tender tears that humanize the ſoul,
The ſigh that charms, the pang that gives delight;
He dwells too near to cruelty and pride,
And is a novice in the ſchool of virtue.

CASSANDRA.

We thank thee, ſtranger, for thy generous pity.
Heaven has, it ſeems, throughout diffus'd the good.
May the kind gods, the hoſpitable powers,
For this befriend thee! Thou muſt wander ſtill,
Wilt their protection want.—But Agamemnon!
Where is the king?

MELISANDER.

He bathes him for the banquet,
The banquet earn'd by ten years war and toil.

CASSANDRA.

Short-ſighted man! to dream of feſtal joy,
When his next banquet is perhaps with Pluto.
He comes! the god comes ruſhing on my ſoul!
O gently ſooth me with the voice of muſic!
Aſſuage my pangs with harmony!—Methinks,
I hear Apollo's lyre.

MELISANDER.

Myſterious Powers!

CASSANDRA.

'Tis gone—And now harſh diſcord takes its place:
Dire yellings now affright my trembling ear!
What means this uproar of the howling foreſt?

The lioneſs and wolf, together leagu'd,
Purſue the lion's life.—Behold! the ſnare,
Th' infernal ſnare is ſet, ſpread by the ſtream,
Where, unſuſpecting harm, he bathes at noon.
Soon will theſe guiltleſs waters bluſh with blood.

MELISANDER.

There is a ſort of gloomy light in this,
That flaſhes horror on me.

CASSANDRA.

A black ſwarm
Of fell ideas ſeize my fancy.—Hence!
O ſnatch me from this palace! ſhambles rather!
It ſmells of carnage; breathes a hideous ſteam,
As if from gaping ſepulchres exhal'd.
And, lo! the ſpotleſs loves, the ſports, the joys,
The weeping Lares fly: while in their place,
The vices all, the raging furies come;
And with them Comus, the fluſh'd god of banquets,
Beſmear'd with gore—They ſing the funeral hymn—
What do I ſee? What mean theſe mangled forms?
Theſe pale, theſe nightly phantoms; ſuch as riſe,
To working fancy's eye, in troubled dreams?—
See! where they ſit for ever at the gates,
Demanding vengeance—Vengeance is at hand—
Ha! 'tis the murder'd boys, whoſe limbs were here,
Serv'd up to their own ſire, to be devour'd!——

MELISANDER.

She wakes my dread—The ſtory of Thyeſtes!

CASSANDRA.

With this devoted race involv'd I fall:
Nor falls the ſlave alone—The maſter falls.

But man ſhall die for man, for woman woman:
Remember this.

MELISANDER.

The ſlave, the maſter fall!

CASSANDRA.

Ah boſom-traitreſs! Ill-perſuaded queen!
And canſt thou then the barbarous ſecret keep?—

MELISANDER.

What queen? what ſecret? Speak more plain, Caſſandra!

CASSANDRA.

From guilt, in vain, to greater guilt you fly,
From crime to crime precipitated—No!
The wicked find no peace—Diſtraction waits thee!—
One effort more—Yes, ſave thy lord, and die—
That throw belong'd to virtue—Cannot then
The gentle Powers prevail?—A moment yet,
The doubtful balance yet allows a moment—
Down, down it goes, for vengeance and for Troy!
But, ah! ſuch vengeance, as even foes themſelves
Abhor to ſee!

MELISANDER.

She ſtaggers all my reaſon.
Unveil theſe dreadful oracles—Perhaps—

CASSANDRA.

Yes, in a moment, they will be too plain.
The moment comes! The furies laſh it on!
Ha! Now!

MELISANDER.

Unuſual horror creeps——

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Keep from the murderous ſacrificer's hand,

O keep the victim bull! Lo! ſeiz'd, he ſpurns,
He foams in vain—Behold the lifted blow!
Behold the thirſty ſteel!—They ſtrike him!—Hark!
What diſmal echoes run from room to room!

MELISANDER.

I heard a diſtant noiſe!——

[*The noiſe of* Agamemnon's *aſſaſſination heard indiſtinctly, and at a diſtance, behind the ſcenes.*

CASSANDRA.

Again!—They ſtrive,
Th' aſſaſſins labour who ſhall wound him moſt.
'Tis done!—He falls!—

AGAMEMNON, *behind the Scenes.*

[*The noiſe heard diſtinctly, and near.*

Off! villains! cowards! off!—
By villains murder'd!—Oh!

MELISANDER.

Great gods! the king!

SCENE IV.

MELISANDER, CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives*, ELECTRA, ORESTES.

ELECTRA.

Stop, generous ſtranger! Agamemnon's friend!

MELISANDER.

What would Electra? what with Meliſander?

ELECTRA.

Heavens! Meliſander!

MELISANDER.

To the king's aſſiſtance
I fly; detain me not.

ELECTRA.

He is no more!——

MELISANDER.

Ha! dead!

ELECTRA.

Yes, murder'd by Egiſthus! dead!
Pierc'd with a thouſand wounds! O horror! horror!—
We have not time for grief—Oreſtes—Quick!
Fly! ſave my brother!

ORESTES.

Leave my father!—No!
It is but once that I have ever ſeen him,
Shall I no more?

ELECTRA.

But to revenge his death,
O fly, Oreſtes, for that glorious purpoſe!
Tremendous gods! Methinks, I ſee his ghoſt,
That beckons you away!

ORESTES.

I come! I come!
On Meliſander——

ELECTRA.

Brother!

ORESTES.

Oh, my ſiſter!
What will become of thee?

ELECTRA.

Good Meliſander,
O guard my brother! ſave our only hope!—
I heard a noiſe——Farewel!

ORESTES, *going.*

Ah! poor Electra!

SCENE V.

ELECTRA, CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives.*

ELECTRA.

The murderers come! ſtain'd with my father's blood!
Hide me, Caſſandra, hide me from a ſight
I cannot bear, a ſcene to nature ſhocking!

SCENE VI.

The back-ſcene opening diſcovers, at a diſtance, AGAMEMNON's *body.* ELECTRA *throws herſelf by it.*

CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives,* EGISTHUS *with ſome of his party.*

EGISTHUS.

Enough, my friends!—How low, how ſilent, now,
The mighty boaſter lies!—Another blow
Crowns my revenge.——

CASSANDRA.

It ſhall not, baſe aſſaſſin!
The gods are juſt; amidſt the crimes of men,
Are firmly juſt, ſupremely wiſe and good:

The gods are here, in all their terrors preſent!
See where in dreadful majeſty they ſit!
And write thy doom in Agamemnon's blood!

EGISTHUS.

Think not to ſhake me with theſe gloomy fables:
This arm that has acquir'd, ſhall guard my power;
And ſince I now enjoy my long-wiſh'd vengeance,
All here is calm and chearful.

CASSANDRA.

The falſe boaſt
Of agonizing guilt! Thy ſoul, I ſee,
Beneath this harden'd pride, this brutal courage,
Boils with black torments, and with inward tempeſt.
I know whence breaks that gleam of joy athwart thee,
As lightning flaſhes o'er a troubled ſky:
Thou dream'ſt the prince now falls beneath thy fury:
But hear and tremble—young Oreſtes lives!

EGISTHUS.

Hence with thy vain predictions, doating woman!—

SCENE VII.

EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, *&c. and to them* ASSASSINS *ſent to murder* ORESTES.

EGISTHUS.

Well, is Oreſtes dead?

ASSASSIN.

Ah, Sir! eſcap'd—
When all was in confuſion, here, and tumult,

EGISTHUS.

O nothing then is done! Fly! tardy villains!
Purſue him to the fartheſt verge of earth,——
No dark retreat, no country.—But here comes
Another ſtorm. Diſtraction wings her pace.

SCENE VIII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, &c.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Off! give me way! to deſarts let me fly!
The wildeſt ſavage there!——
Why pierce me thus with looks?—In every eye
There is a dagger; chief in thine [*to* Egiſthus]—Ha!
villain!
I know thee; know theſe eyes, where ſmiling love
To the red glarings of a fury's torch
Is now transform'd,——Yes, traitor! turn away:
But, ere you go, give me my peace again;
Give me my happy family around;
Give me my virtue, honour, nay, my glory;
Or give me death, tho' death cannot relieve me.—
Are theſe the deeds of love?—I cannot ſtep,
Unleſs I dip my ſhivering feet in blood.
Compar'd with this polluted, this dire palace,
The ſepulchre is gay.—But whither fly?——
Ah! what avails it where the guilty fly,
Since from themſelves they cannot!—Ha! behold!
The black abyſs diſcloſes to my view;
And down I go, a dark, a deep deſcent!——
Hell from beneath is mov'd at my approach;

Its princes flock around. Behold, they ſay,
The greatly-wretched, greatly-wicked woman!
She who preferr'd the villain to the hero!
The Trojan ſhades, with ſharp deriſion, thank me:
The Grecian droop—Lo! where he comes himſelf!
See! how in ſullen majeſty he ſtalks!—
Oh, look not on me with that ſilent ſcorn!
I am too curs'd already!——

[*Faints into the arms of her Attendants.*

EGISTHUS.

Bear her hence:
And look ſhe be attended well.——But hark!
What new alarm?

SCENE IX.

EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, *&c. to them a* MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

As Meliſander, Sir,
Bore off Oreſtes, to th' aſſembled ſenate
He ſhow'd the prince, and rouz'd them to revenge.
'Tis nought but rage. The people, in a torrent,
By Arcas headed, pour upon the palace.
Beſides, each moment, Agamemnon's troops—

EGISTHUS.

Quick! ſummon here my friends—In Io's grove
They ready wait. We this important day
Will or with conqueſt crown, or bravely die.

CASSANDRA.

No, tyrant, no! the gods refuſe thee that:
Not like the brave, but like the trembling coward,

Th' aſſaſſinating coward, thou ſhalt die;
There! in that ſpot, where Agamemnon lies!

ÆGISTHUS.

Lead theſe ill-boding women to their fate;
And guard Electra.

CASSANDRA.

The moſt grateful gift
A tyrant can beſtow is inſtant death.
We ſhall be happy ſoon. But all the gods,
Combining all their mercy, from remorſe,
From ſcorn and miſery, cannot ſave the villain.

EPILOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MRS. CIBBER.

OUR bard, to modern epilogue a foe,
Thinks ſuch mean mirth but deadens generous woe;
Diſpels in idle air the moral ſigh,
And wipes the tender tear from Pity's eye:
No more with ſocial warmth the boſom burns;
But all th' unfeeling ſelfiſh man returns.
*

Thus he began:—And you approv'd the ſtrain;
Till the next couplet ſunk to light and vain.
You check'd him there.—To you, to reaſon juſt,
He owns he triumph'd in your kind diſguſt.
Charm'd by your frown, by your diſpleaſure grac'd,
He hails the riſing virtue of your taſte.
Wide will its influence ſpread as ſoon as known:
Truth, to be lov'd, needs only to be ſhown.
Confirm it, once, the faſhion to be good:
(Since faſhion leads the fool, and awes the rude)
No petulance ſhall wound the public ear;
No hand applaud what honour ſhuns to hear:
No painful bluſh the modeſt cheek ſhall ſtain;
The worthy breaſt ſhall heave with no diſdain.
Chaſtis'd to decency, the *Britiſh* ſtage
Shall oft invite the fair, invite the ſage:
Both ſhall attend well-pleas'd, well-pleas'd depart;
Or if they doom the verſe, abſolve the heart.

* Another epilogue was ſpoken after the firſt repreſentation of the play, which began with the firſt ſix lines of this: but the reſt of that epilogue having been very juſtly diſliked by the audience, this was ſubſtituted in its place.

ALFRED:

A

MASQUE.

REPRESENTED BEFORE

THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES,

At CLIFFDEN, on the firſt of AUGUST 1740.

By Mr. THOMSON and Mr. MALLET.

Si velimus cum *priorum temporum* neceſſitate certare, vincemur. Ingeniofior eſt enim ad *excogitandum* ſimulatio, veritate; ſervitus, libertate; metus, amore. PLIN. Pan. Trajan.

THE ARGUMENT.

After the Danes had made themſelves maſters of Chippenham, the ſtrongeſt city in the kingdom of Weſſex; Alfred was at once abandoned by all his ſubjects. In this univerſal defection, that monarch found himſelf obliged to retire into the little iſland of Athelney in Somerſetſhire; a place then rough with woods and of difficult acceſs. There, in the habit of a peaſant, he lived unknown, for ſome time, in a ſhepherd's cottage. He is ſuppoſed to be found in this retreat by the earl of Devon; whoſe caſtle, upon the river Tau, was then beſieged by the Danes.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

ALFRED, - - -	Mr. MILWARD.
ELTRUDA, - - -	Mrs. HORTON.
HERMIT, - - -	Mr. QUIN.
Earl of DEVON, - -	Mr. MILLS.
CORIN, a ſhepherd, - -	Mr. SALWAY.
EMMA, his wife, - -	Mrs. CLIVE.

A Band, Soldiers, Spirits.

The SCENE repreſents a plain, ſurrounded with woods. On one ſide, a cottage: on the other, flocks and herds in diſtant proſpect. A hermit's cave in full view, overhung with trees, wild and groteſque.

ALFRED:

A

MASQUE.

ACT I. SCENE I.

CORIN, EMMA.

EMMA.

SHEPHERD, 'tis he. Beneath yon aged oak,
All on the flowery turf he lays him down.

CORIN.

Soft: let us not diſturb him. Gentle Emma,
Poor tho' he be, unfriended and unknown,
My pity waits with reverence on his fortune,
Modeſt of carriage, and of ſpeech moſt gracious,
As if ſome ſaint or angel, in diſguiſe,
Had grac'd our lowly cottage with his preſence.
He ſteals, I know not how, into the heart,
And makes it pant to ſerve him. Truſt me, Emma,
He is no common man.

EMMA.

Some lord, perhaps,
Or valiant chief, that from our deadly foe,

The haughty, cruel, unbelieving Dane,
Seeks ſhelter here.

CORIN.

And ſhelter he ſhall find.
Who loves his country, is my friend and brother.
Behold him well. Fair virtue in his aſpect,
Even thro' the homely ruſſet that conceals him,
Shines forth and proves him noble. Seeſt thou, Emma,
Yon weſtern clouds? The ſun they ſtrive to hide,
Yet darts his beam around.

EMMA.

Your thought is mine;
He is not what his preſent fortunes ſpeak him,
But, ah! the raging foe is all around us:
We dare not keep him here.

CORIN.

Content thee, wife:
This iſland is of ſtrength. Nature's own hand
Hath planted round a deep defence of woods,
The ſounding aſh, the mighty oak; each tree
A ſheltering grove: and choak'd up all between
With wild encumbrance of perplexing thorns,
And horrid brakes. Beyond this woody verge,
Two rivers broad and rapid hem us in.
Along their channel ſpreads the gulphy pool,
And trembling quagmire, whoſe deceitful green
Betrays the foot it tempts. One path alone
Winds to this plain, ſo roughly difficult,
This ſingle arm, poor ſhepherd as I am,
Could well diſpute it with twice twenty Danes.

EMMA.

Yet think, my Corin, on the ſtern decree
Of that proud foe, "Who harbours or relieves

" An Engliſh captain, dies the death of traitors:
" But who their haunts diſcovers, ſhall be ſafe,
" And high rewarded."

CORIN.

Now, juſt Heaven forbid,
A Britiſh man ſhould ever count for gain
What villainy muſt earn. No: are we poor?
Be honeſty our riches. Are we mean,
And humbly born? The true heart makes us noble.
Theſe hands can toil, can ſow the ground, and reap
For thee and thy ſweet babes. Our daily labour
Is daily wealth: it finds us bread and raiment.
Could Daniſh gold give more? And for the death
Theſe tyrants threaten, let me rather meet it,
Than e'er betray my gueſt.——

EMMA.

Alas the while,
That loyal faith is fled from hall and bower,
To dwell with village-ſwains!

CORIN.

Ah, look! behold!
Where, like ſome goodly tree by wintry winds
Torn from the roots and withering, our ſad gueſt
Lies on the ground diffus'd.

EMMA.

I weep to ſee it.

CORIN.

Thou haſt a heart ſweet Pity loves to dwell in.
Dry up thy tears; and lean on this juſt hope:
If yet to do away his country's ſhame,
To ſerve her bravely on ſome bleſt occaſion,
If for theſe ends this ſtranger ſought our cottage,

The heavenly hoſts are hovering here unſeen,
To watch and to protect him.—But, oh! when—
My heart burns for it—ſhall I ſee the hour
Of vengeance on theſe Daniſh infidels,
That war with Heaven and us?

EMMA.

Alas, my love!
Theſe paſſions are not for the poor man's ſtate.
To Heaven and to the rulers of the land
Leave ſuch ambitious thoughts. Be warn'd my Corin:
And think our little all depends on thee.

SONG.

O Peace! the faireſt child of Heaven,
To whom the ſylvan reign was given,
The vale, the fountain, and the grove,
With every ſofter ſcene of love:
Return, ſweet Peace! and chear the weeping ſwain!
Return, with Eaſe and Pleaſure in thy train.

CORIN.

Huſh: ceaſe thy ſong—For ſee, our mournful gueſt
Has rais'd his head—and lo! who comes to greet him;
His friend, the woodman of the neighbouring dale,
Whom late, as yeſter evening-ſtar aroſe,
At his requeſt I found and hither brought.

SCENE II.

ALFRED, *Earl of* DEVON.

ALFRED.

How long, O ever gracious Heaven! how long
Shall war thus deſolate this proſtrate land?

All, all is loſt—And Alfred lives to tell it!
His cities laid in duſt! his ſubjects ſlaughter'd!
Or into ſlaves debas'd! the murderous foe
Proud and exulting in the general ſhame!——
Are theſe things ſo? and he without the means
Of great revenge? caſt down below the hope
Of ſuccouring thoſe he weeps for? O deſpair!
O grief of griefs!

DEVON.

Old as I am, my liege,
In rough war harden'd, and with death familiar,
Theſe eyes have long forgot to melt with ſoftneſs:
But O, my gracious maſter, they have ſeen——
All-pitying Heaven!—ſuch ſights of ruthleſs rage,
Of total deſolation——

ALFRED.

O my people!
O ruin'd England!—Devon, thoſe were bleſt,
Who dy'd before this time. Ha! and thoſe robbers,
That violate the ſanctity of leagues,
The reverend ſeal of oaths; that baſely broke,
Like nightly ruffians, on the hour of peace,
And ſtole a victory from men unarm'd,
Thoſe Danes enjoy their crimes! dread Vengeance! ſon
Of power and juſtice! come, array'd in terrors,
Thy garment red with blood, thy keen ſword drawn:
O come, and on the heads of faithleſs men
Pour ample retribution; men whoſe triumph
Upbraids eternal Juſtice.—But no more:
Submiſſion is Heaven's due.—I will not launch
Into that dark abyſs where thought muſt drown.
Proceed, my lord: on with the mournful tale,
My griefs broke off.

DEVON.

From yonder heath-crown'd hill,
This iſland's eaſtern point, where in one ſtream
The Thone and Parret roll their blending waves,
I look'd, and ſaw the progreſs of the foe,
As of ſome tempeſt, ſome devouring fire,
That ruins without mercy where it ſpreads.
The riches of the year, the golden grain
That liberal crown'd our plains, lies trampled wide
By hoſtile feet, or rooted up; and waſte
Deforms the broad highway. From ſpace to ſpace,
Far as my ſtraining eye could ſhoot its beam,
Trees, cottages, and caſtles ſmoak to heaven
In one aſcending cloud. But oh for pity!
That way, my lord, where yonder verdant height
Declining ſlides into a fruitful vale,
Unſightly now and bare; a few poor hinds,
Grey-hair'd, and thinly clad, ſtood and beheld
The common ravage: motionleſs and mute
With hands to heaven up-rais'd, they ſtood, and wept—
My tears attended theirs——

ALFRED.

If this ſad ſight
Could pain thee to ſuch anguiſh, what muſt I
Their king and parent feel?—It is a torment
Beyond the ſtrength of patience to endure.
Why end I not at once this wretched being?
The means are in my hand.—But ſhall a prince
Thus poorly ſhroud him in the grave from pain,
And ſenſe of ſhame? The madman, nay, the coward,
Has often dar'd the ſame. A monarch holds
His life in truſt for others. I will live then:
Let Heaven diſpoſe the reſt.

DEVON.

Thrice-noble Alfred,
And England's only hope, whoſe virtues raiſe
Our frail mortality, our human duſt,
Up to angelic ſplendor and perfection;
With you to bear the worſt of ills, the ſpoil
Of waſteful war, the loſs of life or freedom,
Is happineſs, is glory.

ALFRED.

Ah, look round thee:
That mud-built cottage is thy ſovereign's palace.
Yon hind, whoſe daily toil is all his wealth,
Lodges and feeds him. Are theſe times for flattery,
Or call it praiſe? ſuch gaudy attributes
Would miſbecome our beſt and proudeſt fortunes.
But what are mine? what is this high-prais'd Alfred?
Among ten thouſand wretches, moſt undone.
That prince who ſees his country laid in ruins,
His ſubjects periſhing beneath the ſword
Of foreign rage, who ſees and cannot ſave them,
Is but ſupreme in miſery!

DEVON.

My liege!
Who has not known ill fortune, never knew
Himſelf, or his own virtue. Be of comfort:
We can but die at laſt. Till that hour comes,
Let noble anger keep our hopes alive.
A ſudden thought, as if from heaven inſpir'd,
Darts on my ſoul. One caſtle ſtill is ours,
Tho' cloſe begirt and ſhaken by the Danes.
In this diſguiſe, my chance of paſſing on,
Of entering there unknown, is promiſing,
And wears a lucky face. 'Tis our laſt ſtake,

And I will play it like a man whoſe life,
Whoſe honour hangs upon a ſingle caſt.
Mean while, my lord ——

ALFRED.

Ha! Devon, thou haſt rouz'd
My ſlumbering virtue. I applaud thy thought.
The praiſe of this brave daring ſhall be thine;
The danger ſhall be common. We will both
Strait tempt the Daniſh camp, and gain this fort;
To animate our brothers of the war,
Thoſe Engliſhmen who yet deſerve that name.
And hear, eternal Juſtice! if my life
Can make atonement for them, King of kings!
Accept thy willing victim. On my head
Be all their woes: to them be grace and mercy.
Come on, my noble friend.

DEVON.

Ah, good my liege,
What fits a private valour, and might grace
The ſimple ſoldier's courage, would proclaim
His general's raſhneſs. You are England's king:
Your infant children, and your much-lov'd queen;
Nay more, the public weal, ten thouſand ſouls,
Whoſe hope you are, whoſe all depends on you,
Forbid this enterprize. 'Tis nobler virtue
To check this ardour, to reſerve your ſword
For ſome great day of known and high import;
That to your country, to the judging world
Shall juſtify all hazards you may run,
This trial ſuits but me.

ALFRED.

Well, go, my friend;
If thou ſhalt proſper, thou wilt call me hence

To head my people from their fears recover'd.
May that good angel, who inſpir'd thy thought,
Throw round thy ſteps a veil of cloudy air,
That thou may'ſt walk inviſible and ſafe.
He 's gone—and now without a friend to aid me,
I ſtand alone, abandon'd to the gloom
Of my ſad thoughts—Said I without a friend?
Oh blaſphemous diſtruſt! Have I not Thee,
All-powerful friend and guardian of the righteous,
Have I not Thee to aid me? Let that thought
Support my drooping ſoul.—But, liſt. Ha! whence
Theſe air-born notes that ſound in meaſur'd ſweetneſs
Thro' this vaſt ſilence?

SCENE III.

Solemn muſic is heard at a diſtance. It comes nearer in a full ſymphony: after which a ſingle trumpet ſounds a high and awakening air. Then the following ſtanzas are ſung by two aërial ſpirits unſeen.

Firſt SPIRIT.

Hear, Alfred, father of the ſtate,
Thy genius Heaven's high will declare!
What proves the hero truly great,
Is never, never to deſpair:
Is never to deſpair.

Second SPIRIT.

Thy hope awake, thy heart expand
With all its vigour, all its fires.
Ariſe! and ſave a ſinking land!
Thy country calls, and Heaven inſpires.

Both SPIRITS.

Earth calls, and Heaven inſpires.

SCENE IV.

ALFRED *alone.*

All hail, ye gentle miniſters of heaven!
Your ſong inſpires new patience thro' my breaſt,
And generous hope: it wings my mounting ſoul
Above th' entangling maſs of earthly paſſions,
That keep frail man, tho' ſtruggling to be free,
Still fluttering in the duſt.

SCENE V.

ALFRED, *the* HERMIT *advancing from his cave.*

ALFRED.

Thrice-happy Hermit!
Whom thus the heavenly habitants attend,
Bleſſing thy calm retreat; while ruthleſs war
Fills the polluted land with blood and crimes.
In this extremity of England's fate,
Led by thy ſacred character, I come
For comfort and advice. Thy aged wiſdom,
Purg'd from the ſtormy cloud of human paſſions,
And by a ray from heaven exalted, ſees
Deep thro' futurity. Say what remains,
What yet remains to ſave our proſtrate country?
Nor ſcorn this anxious queſtion even from me,
A nameleſs ſtranger.

HERMIT.

Alfred, England's king,
All hail! and welcome to this humble cell.

ALFRED.

Whence doſt thou know me, venerable father?

HERMIT.

Laſt night, when with a draught from that cool fountain
I had my wholeſome, ſober ſupper crown'd;
As is my ſtated cuſtom, forth I walk'd,
Beneath the ſolemn gloom, and glittering ſky,
To feed my ſoul with prayer and meditation.
And thus to inward harmony compos'd,
That ſweeteſt muſic of the grateful heart,
Whoſe each emotion is a ſilent hymn,
I to my couch retir'd. Strait on mine eyes
A pleaſing ſlumber fell, whoſe myſtic power
Seal'd up my ſenſes, but enlarg'd my ſoul.
At once, diſclos'd amid the dark waſte night,
Appear'd a viſion—not the dream of fancy,
But ſent from heaven, prophetic, and divine.
For know, this ample element contains
Unnumber'd ſpiritual beings, or malign,
Or good to man. Theſe, when the groſſer eye
Of Nature ſleeps, oft play their ſeveral parts,
As on a ſcene, before th' attentive mind,
And to the favour'd man diſcloſe the future.
Led by theſe ſpirits friendly to this iſle,
I liv'd thro' future ages; felt the virtue,
The great, the glorious paſſions that will fire
Diſtant poſterity: when guardian laws
Are by the patriot in the glowing ſenate
Won from corruption; when th' impatient arm
Of liberty, invincible, ſhall ſcourge
The tyrants of mankind—and when the deep,
Thro' all her ſwelling waves, ſhall proudly joy
Beneath the boundleſs empire of thy ſons.

I ſaw thee, Alfred, too—But o'er thy fortunes
Lay clouds impenetrable.

ALFRED.

Ah, good hermit,
That ſcene is dark indeed! Ye awful powers!
To what am I reſerv'd? Still muſt I roam
A wanderer here, inglorious and unknown?
Or am I deſtin'd your great inſtrument,
From fierce oppreſſion to redeem this land?

HERMIT.

Perhaps, the laſt.—But, prince, remember, then,
The vows, the noble uſes, of affliction.
Preſerve the quick humanity it gives,
The pitying, ſocial ſenſe of human weakneſs;
Yet keep thy ſtubborn fortitude entire,
The manly heart that to another's woe
Is tender, but ſuperior to its own.
Learn to ſubmit; yet learn to conquer fortune.
Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
And offices of life: to life itſelf,
With all its vain and tranſient joys, ſit looſe.
Chief, let devotion to the ſovereign mind,
A ſteady, chearful, abſolute dependance
On his beſt, wiſeſt government, poſſeſs thee.
In thoughtleſs, gay proſperity, when all
Attends our wiſh, when nought is ſeen around us
But kneeling flattery, and obedient fortune;
Then are blind mortals apt, within themſelves
To fix their ſtay, forgetful of the giver.
But when thus humbled, Alfred, as thou art,
When to their feeble natural powers reduc'd,
'Tis then they feel this univerſal truth——
That Heaven is all in all—and man is nothing.

ALFRED.

I thank thee, father, for thy pious counſel.
And witneſs, thou dread Power! who ſeeſt my heart;
That if not to perform my regal taſk,
To be the common father of my people,
Patron of honour, virtue, and religion;
If not to ſhelter induſtry, to guard
Her honeſt portion from oppreſſive pride,
From waſteful riot, and the ſons of rapine,
Who baſely raviſh what they dare not earn;
If not to deal out juſtice, like the ſun,
With equal light; if not to ſpread thy bounty,
The treaſures truſted to me, not my own,
On all the ſmiling ranks of nouriſh'd life;
If not to raiſe our drooping Engliſh name,
To clothe it yet with terror; make this land
Renown'd for peaceful arts to bleſs mankind,
And generous war to humble proud oppreſſors:
If not to build on an eternal baſe,
On liberty and laws, the public weal:
If not for theſe great ends I am ordain'd,
May I ne'er idly fill the throne of England!

HERMIT.

Still may thy breaſt theſe ſentiments retain,
In proſperous life.

ALFRED.

Proſperity were ruin,
Could it deſtroy or change ſuch thoughts as theſe.
When Thoſe whom Heaven diſtinguiſhes o'er millions,
Profuſely gives them honours, riches, power,
Whate'er th' expanded heart can wiſh; when they,
Accepting the reward, neglect the duty;

Or worſe, pervert thoſe gifts to deeds of ruin:
Is there a wretch they rule ſo mean as they?
Guilty, at once, of ſacrilege to Heaven,
And of perfidious robbery to men——
But hark! methinks I hear a plaintive voice
Sigh thro' the vale, and wake the mournful echo.

SONG.

Sweet valley, ſay, where, penſive lying,
For me, our children, England, ſighing,
The beſt of mortals leans his head.
Ye fountains, dimpled by my ſorrow,
Ye brooks that my complainings borrow,
O lead me to his lonely bed:
Or if my lover,
Deep woods, you cover,
Ah whiſper where your ſhadows o'er him ſpread!

'Tis not the loſs of pomp and pleaſure,
Of empire, or of tinſel treaſure,
That drops this tear, that ſwells this groan:
No; from a nobler cauſe proceeding,
A heart with love and fondneſs bleeding,
I breathe my ſadly-pleaſing moan,
With other anguiſh,
I ſcorn to languiſh:
For Love will feel no ſorrows but his own.

SCENE VI.

ALFRED, HERMIT, ELTRUDA, *advancing*.

ALFRED.

Sure, by the voice, and purport of the ſong,
This generous mourner is my queen Eltruda.

And yet how can that be?—O all good Powers!
'Tis ſhe! 'tis ſhe!

ELTRUDA.

My lord, my life, my Alfred!
Oh take me to thy arms; with toil o'ercome,
And ſudden tranſport, thus at once to find thee,
In this wild foreſt, pathleſs and perplext!

ALFRED.

Come to my ſoul, thou deareſt, beſt of women!
Come, and repoſe thy ſorrows in my boſom.
O all my paſſions mix in doubtful ſtrife!
If pain or joy prevail, I ſcarce can ſay,
While thus I claſp thee, and recal the perils
To which thy trembling ſteps have been expos'd.
Why haſt thou left the convent where I plac'd thee?
Why, unprotected, truſt thee to a land,
A barbarous land, where rages Daniſh war!
Our hoſpitable England is no more!

ELTRUDA.

Dire was the cauſe, my Alfred. The rous'd country,
All wild in breathleſs terror and confuſion,
Inform'd us, a near party of the Danes,
Whoſe brutal fury ſpares no ſex, no age,
No place however privileg'd or holy,
Were on full march that way. Inſtant I fled,
In this diſguiſe, with only theſe attendants:
But in our way oft chear'd by airy voices,
To bear to this retreat our helpleſs children.

ALFRED.

Ah wanderers too young! ah hapleſs children!
But more unhappy Sire! who cannot give,
To thoſe he loves, protection.

ELTRUDA.

Thou too, Alfred,
Art thou not unattended? None to ſerve thee,
To ſooth thy woes, to watch thy broken ſlumbers!
And when the ſilent tear o'erflows thy eye,
None, with the warm and cordial lip of love,
To kiſs it off! There is in love a power,
There is a ſoft divinity, that draws
Tranſport even from diſtreſs; that gives the heart
A certain pang, excelling far the joys
Of groſs unfeeling life. Beſides, my Alfred,
Even had the fury of this barbarous foe
Not forc'd me from the convent, life is ſhort;
And now it trembles on the wing of danger:
Why ſhould we loſe it then? One well-ſav'd hour,
In ſuch a tender circumſtance to lovers,
Is better than an age of common time.

ALFRED.

Oh, 'tis too much! thy tenderneſs o'ercomes me!
Nay, look not on me with that ſweet dejection,
Thro' tears that pierce my ſoul!—Chear thee, my love:
Hope ſtill the beſt; that better days await us,
And fairer from remembrance.—Thou, Eltruda,
Thou art a pledge of happineſs! On thee
Good angels wait; they led thy journey hither:
And I have heard them, in this wild retreat,
Warbling immortal airs, and ſtrains of comfort.—
But, ah, the foe is round us: and this iſle
Now holds my ſoul's beſt wealth, the treaſur'd ſtore
Of all my joys.—I go to ſkirt it round,
To viſit every creek and ſedgy bank,
Where ruſtles thro' the reeds the ſhadowy gale;
Or where the bending umbrage drinks the ſtream;

Leſt danger unawares ſhould ſteal upon us.
And now, by ſlow degrees, ſolemn and ſad,
Wide-falling o'er the world, the nightly ſhades
Huſh the brown woods, and deepen all their horrors:
While, humbled into reſt, and aw'd by darkneſs,
Each creature ſeeks the covert. To that cell
Retire, my life. I will not long be abſent.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ALFRED *alone.*

'TIS now the depth of darkneſs and repoſe.
All nature ſeems to reſt: while Alfred wakes
To think, and to be wretched.—Where yon oak
With wide and duſky ſhade o'erhangs the ſtream,
That glides in ſilence by, I took my ſtand:
What time the glow-worm thro' the dewy path
Firſt ſhot his twinkling flame. I ſtood attentive,
Liſtening each noiſe from wood-clad hill and dale;
But all was huſh'd around. Nor trumpet's clang,
Nor ſhout of roving foe, nor haſty tread
Of evening paſſenger, diſturb'd the wide
And awful ſtilneſs. Homeward as I ſped,
O'er many a delve, thro' many a path perplext,
Maze running into maze; ill-boding thoughts
Haunted my ſteps.—Perhaps my gallant friend,
Diſcover'd to the Danes, this moment bleeds
Beneath their ſwords! or lies a breathleſs corſe,
The prey of midnight wolves.—Some mournful ſound
Strikes ſudden on my ſenſe.

SCENE II.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA.

ELTRUDA.

Here will I lean
On this green bank, to wait the wiſh'd return
Of morning and my lord.

ALFRED.

My gentle love,
Eltruda, why to this untimely ſky
Expoſe thy health? The dews of night fall faſt:
The chill breeze ſighs aloud.

ELTRUDA.

I could not reſt.
Can love repoſe when apprehenſion wakes,
And whiſpers to the heart all dreadful things,
That walk with night and ſolitude? Methought,
In each low murmur of the woods, I heard
Th' invading foe—or heard my Alfred groan!
Our tender infants too—their fancy'd cries
Still ſound within my ears!

ALFRED.

Eltruda, there
I am a woman too: I who ſhould chear,
And ſhelter thee from every care. My children!
The thought of what may chance to them, complete
Their father's ſum of woes. O what ſafe ſhade
Can ſkreen their opening bloſſom from the ſtorm
That beats ſevere on us! Not ſweeter buds
The primroſe in the vale, nor ſooner ſhrinks
At winter's churliſh blaſt——

ELTRUDA.

Behold, my lord—
Good angels ſhield us—What a flood of brightneſs
Waves round our heads!

ALFRED.

The hermit moves this way.
That wondrous man holds converſe with the hoſt

Of higher natures. Theſe far beaming fires
Were doubtleſs kindled up at his command.
Be ſilent and attentive.

SCENE III.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA, HERMIT.

HERMIT.

I have heard
Thy fond complainings, Alfred.

ALFRED.

You have then,
Good father, heard the cauſe that wrings them from me.

HERMIT.

The human race are ſons of ſorrow born:
And each muſt have his portion. Vulgar minds
Refuſe, or crouch beneath their load: the brave
Bear theirs without repining.

ALFRED.

Who can bear
The ſhaft that wounds him thro' an infant's ſide?
When whom we love, to whom we owe protection,
Implore the hand we cannot reach to ſave them?

HERMIT.

Weep not, Eltruda.——Yet thou art a king,
All private paſſions fall before that name.
Thy ſubjects claim thee whole.

ALFRED.

Can public truſt,
O reverend ſage! deſtroy the ſofter ties

That twine around the parent's yearning heart,
That holy paſſion Heaven itſelf infus'd,
And blended with the ſtream that feeds our life?

HERMIT.

You love your children, prince—

ALFRED.

Lives there on earth,
In air, or ocean, creature tame or wild,
That has not known this univerſal love?
All Nature feels it intimate and deep,
And all her ſons of inſtinct or of reaſon.

HERMIT.

Then ſhew that paſſion in its nobleſt form.
Seaſon their tender years with every virtue,
Social or ſelf-retir'd; of public greatneſs,
Or lovely in the hour of private life;
With all that can exalt, or can adorn
Their princely rank.

ALFRED.

Alas, their hope muſt ſtoop,
Such my unhappy fate, to humbler aims:
Affliction and baſe want muſt be their teachers.

HERMIT.

Affliction is the wholeſome ſoil of virtue:
Where patience, honour, ſweet humanity,
Calm fortitude take root, and ſtrongly flouriſh.
But proſperous fortune, that allures with pleaſure,
Dazzles with pomp, and undermines with flattery,
Poiſons the ſoil, and its beſt product kills.
Should'ſt thou regain thy throne—

ALFRED.

My throne? What glimpſe,
What ſmalleſt ray of hope——

HERMIT.

That day may come—
What do I feel? My labouring breaſt expands
To give the glorious inſpiration room.
And now the cloud that o'er thy future fate,
Like total night, lay heavy and obſcure,
Fades into air: and all the brightening ſcene
Dawns gay before me! A long line of kings,
From thee deſcending, glorious and renown'd,
In ſhadowy pomp I ſee!

Genius of England! hovering near,
In all thy radiant charms appear.

O come and ſummon, from the world unknown,
Thoſe mighty chiefs, thoſe ſons of future fame,
Who, ages hence, this iſland ſhall adorn,
And ſpread to diſtant realms her glorious name.
Slow let the viſionary forms ariſe,
And ſolemn paſs before our wondering eyes.

[*Muſic grand and awful. The Genius deſcending ſings the following*

SONG.

From thoſe eternal regions bright,
Where ſuns, that never ſet in night,
Diffuſe the golden day:
Where Spring, unfading, pours around,
O'er all the dew-impearled ground,
Her thouſand colours gay:

O whether on the fountain's flowery ſide,
Whence living waters glide,
Or in the fragrant grove,
Whoſe ſhade emboſoms peace and love,
New pleaſures all your hours employ,
And raviſh every ſenſe with every joy!
Great heirs of empire! yet unborn,
Who ſhall this iſland late adorn;
A monarch's drooping thought to chear,
Appear! appear! appear!

Spirits of EDWARD III. PHILIPPA *his queen, and the* BLACK PRINCE *his ſon, ariſe.*

HERMIT.

Alfred, look; and ſay,
What ſeeſt thou yonder?

ALFRED.

Three majeſtic ſhapes:
Two habited like mighty warriors old;
A third in whoſe bright aſpect beauty ſmiles
More ſoft and feminine. A lucid veil,
From her fair neck dependant floats around,
Light-hovering in the gale.

HERMIT.

O Alfred, man
Belov'd of Heaven, behold a king *indeed*;
Matchleſs in arms; in arts of peaceful rule,
A ſovereign's trueſt glory, yet more fam'd,
England's third Edward!—At his fear'd approach,
Proud France, even now, thro' all her dukedoms quakes,
Her Genius ſighs: and from th' eternal ſhore,
The ſoul of her great Charles, a recent gueſt,
Looks back to earth, and mourns the diſtant woes

His realms are doom'd to feel from Edward's wrath.
Beneath his ſtandard, Britain ſhall go forth,
Array'd for conqueſt, terrible in glory;
And nations ſhrink before her. O what deaths,
What deſolation ſhall her vengeance ſpread,
From engines yet unfound; whoſe lightnings flaſh,
Whoſe thunders roar, amazing, o'er the plain:
As if this king had ſummon'd from on high
Heaven's dread artillery to fight his battle!
Nor is renown in war his ſole ambition:
A nobler paſſion labours in his breaſt——
Alfred attend—to make his people bleſt!
The ſacred rights that reaſon loudly claims
For free-born men—theſe, Alfred, are his care:
Oft to confirm, and fix them on the baſe
Of equal laws.—O father of mankind!
Succeſſive praiſes from a grateful land
Shall ſaint thy name for ever!

ALFRED.

Holy ſage,
Whom angels thus enlighten and inſpire,
My boſom kindles at thy heaven-born flame.
Great Edward! Be thy conqueſts and their praiſe
Unrival'd to thyſelf. But O thy fame
For care paternal of the public weal!
For England bleſt at home—my rapt heart pants
To equal that renown!

HERMIT.

Know farther, Alfred;
A ſovereign's great example forms a people.
The public breaſt is noble, or is vile,
As he inſpires it. In this Edward's time,

Warm'd by his courage, by his honour rais'd,
High flames the Britiſh ſpirit like the ſun,
To ſhine o'er half the globe: and where it ſhines,
The cheriſh'd world to brighten and enrich.
Laſt ſee this monarch in his hour of leiſure;
Even ſocial on a throne, and taſting joys
To ſolitary greatneſs ſeldom known,
As friend, as huſband, and as father bleſt.
That god-like *youth* remark, his eldeſt hope,
Who gives new luſtre to the name he bears;
A hero ere a man.—I ſee him now
On Creſſy's glorious plain! The father's heart,
With anxious love and wonder at his daring,
Beats high in mingled tranſport. Great himſelf,
Great above *jealouſy*, the guilty mark
That brands all meaner minds, ſee, he applauds
The *filial excellence*, and gives him ſcope
To blaze in his full brightneſs!—Lo, again
He ſends him dreadful to a nobler field:
The danger and the glory all his own!
A *captive king*, the rival of his arms,
I ſee adorn his triumph! Heaven! what grace
What ſplendor from his gracious temper mild
That triumph draws! As gentle mercy kind,
He chears the hoſtile prince whoſe fall he weeps!

ALFRED.

A ſon ſo rich in virtues, and ſo grac'd
With all that gives thoſe virtues fair to ſhine,
When I would aſk of Heaven ſome mighty boon,
Should claim the foremoſt place.

HERMIT.

Remember then,
What to thy infant ſons from thee is due,
As parent and as prince.

ELTRUDA.

Forgive me, Hermit,
Forgive a queen and wife her anxious fondneſs.
Yon beauteous ſhade, that as I gaze her o'er,
My wonder draws, eſcapes your graver thought.

HERMIT.

O bright Eltruda! thou whoſe blooming youth,
Whoſe amiable ſweetneſs promiſe bleſſings
To Alfred and to England! ſee, and mark,
In yonder pleaſing form, the beſt of wives,
The happieſt too, repaid with all the faith,
With all the friendſhip, love and duty claim.
She, powerful o'er the heart her charms enſlave—
O virtue rarely practis'd!—uſes nobly
That happy influence; to prompt each purpoſe
Fair honour kindles in her Edward's breaſt.
Amid the pomps, the pleaſures of a court,
Humble of heart, ſeverely good; the friend
Of modeſt worth, the parent of the poor,
Eltruda! O tranſmit theſe nobleſt charms
To that fair *daughter*, that unfolding roſe,
With which, *as on this day**, Heaven crown'd your loves.

Spirit of ELIZABETH *ariſes.*

ALFRED.

Say, who is ſhe, in whom the noble graces,
Th' engaging manner, dignity, and eaſe,
Are join'd with manly ſenſe and reſolution?

* This maſque was written to be acted at Cliffden, on the birth-day of her royal highneſs the princeſs Auguſta.

HERMIT.

The great Eliza. She, amid a world
That threatning ſwells in high commotion round her;
Each dangerous ſtate her unrelenting foe,
And chief a proud enormous empire ſtretch'd
O'er half mankind; with not one friendly power,
But what her kind creating hand ſhall raiſe
From out the marſhes of the branching Rhine;
And min'd, at home, her ever-tottering throne
By reſtleſs bigots, who, beneath the maſk
Of mild religion, are to every crime
Set looſe, the faithleſs ſons of barbarous zeal:
Yet ſhe ſhall crown this happy iſle with peace,
With arts, with riches, grandeur, and renown;
And quell, by turns, the madneſs of her foes.
As when the winds, from different quarters, urge
The tempeſt on our ſhore; ſecure the cliffs
Repel its idle rage, and pour it back,
In broken billows, foaming to the main.

ALFRED.

How ſhall ſhe, Hermit, gain theſe glorious ends?

HERMIT.

By ſilent wiſdom, whoſe informing power
Works unperceiv'd: that ſeems in council ſlow;
But, when reſolv'd, and ripe for execution,
That darts like lightning from the ſecret gloom:
By ever ſeizing the right *point of view*,
Her trueſt intereſt; which ſhe firm purſues,
With ſteady patience, thro' the maze of ſtate,
The ſtorm of oppoſition, the mixt views,
And thwarting manag'd paſſions of mankind:
By healing the diviſions of her people,
And ſowing the fell peſt among her foes:

By ſaving, from the vermin of a court,
Her treaſure; which, when fair occaſion calls,
She knows to laviſh, in protecting arts,
In guarding nations, and in nurſing ſtates:
By calling up to power, and public life,
Each virtue, each ability; yet *ſhe*,
Amid the various worthies glowing round her
Still ſhines the firſt; the central ſun that wakes,
That rules their every motion: not the ſlave,
And paſſive property of her own creatures.
But the great ſoul that animates her reign,
That lights it to perfection, is the love,
The confidence unbounded, which her wiſdom,
Her probity and juſtice, ſhall inſpire
Into the public breaſt. Hence cordial faith,
Which nought can ſhake; hence unexhauſted treaſure:
And hence, above all mercenary force,
The hand that by the free-born heart is rais'd,
And guards the blended weal of prince and people.
She too ſhall raiſe Britannia's naval power;
Shall greatly raviſh, from inſulting Spain,
The world-commanding ſceptre of the deep.

ELTRUDA.

O matchleſs queen! O glory of her ſex!
The great idea, father, fills my ſoul,
And bids it glow beyond a woman's paſſions.

Spirit of WILLIAM III. *ariſes.*

HERMIT.

Once more, O Alfred, raiſe thine eyes, and mark,
Who next adorns the ſcene, yon laurel'd *ſhade*.
Ere yet the age that clos'd this female reign

Hath led around its train of circling years,
Shall Britain on the verge of ruin ſtand.
A monarch, loſt to greatneſs, to renown,
The ſlave of dreaming monks, ſhall fill her throne,
Weak and aſpiring; fond of lawleſs rule,
The lawleſs rule his mean ambition covets
Unequal to acquire. You prince thou ſaw'ſt,
To glory tutor'd by the hand ſevere
Of ſharp Adverſity, ſhall Heaven upraiſe,
And injur'd nations with joint call invoke,
Their laſt, their only refuge. Lo! he comes:
Wide o'er the billows of the boundleſs deep
His navy rides triumphant: and the ſhores
Of ſhouting Albion echo with his name.
Immortal William! from before his face,
Flies Superſtition, flies oppreſſive Power,
With vile Servility that crouch'd and kiſs'd
The whip he trembled at. From this great hour
Shall Britain date her rights and laws reſtor'd:
And one high purpoſe rule her ſovereign's heart;
To ſcourge the pride of France, that foe profeſs'd
To England and to freedom. Yet I ſee,
From diſtant climes in peaceful triumph borne,
Another KING ariſe! His early youth
With verdant laurel crown'd, for deeds of arms
That Reaſon's voice approves; for courage, rais'd
Beyond all aid from paſſion, greatly calm!
Intrepidly ſerene!—In days of peace,
Around his throne the human virtues wait,
And fair adorn him with their mildeſt beams;
Good without ſhow, above ambition great;
Wiſe, equal, merciful, the friend of man!
O Alfred! ſhould thy fate, long ages hence,
In meaning ſcenes recall'd, exalt the joy

Of ſome glad feſtal day, before a *prince*
Sprung from that king belov'd—Hear, gracious Heaven!
Thy ſoft humanity, thy patriot heart,
Thy manly virtue, ſteddy, great, reſolv'd,
Be his ſupreme ambition! and with theſe,
The happineſs, the glory, that await
Thy better days, be ſhower'd upon his head!

ALFRED.

O Hermit! thou haſt rais'd me to new life!
New hopes, new triumphs ſwell my bounding heart—

HERMIT.

It comes! it comes!—The promis'd ſcene diſcloſes!
Already the great work of Fate begins!
The mighty wheels are turning, whence will ſpread,
Beyond the limits of our narrow world,
The fair dominions, Alfred, of thy ſons.
Behold the warrior bright with Daniſh ſpoils!—
The *raven* droops his wings—and hark! the trumpet,
Exulting, ſpeaks the reſt.

SCENE IV.

Symphony of martial muſic.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA, HERMIT, *Earl of* DEVON, *followed by Soldiers.*

ALFRED.

My friend return'd!
O welcome, welcome! but what happy tidings
Smile in thy chearful countenance?——

DEVON.

My Liege,
Your troops have been ſucceſsful. But to Heaven
Aſcend the praiſe! For ſure th' event exceeds
The hand of man.

ALFRED.

How was it, noble Devon?

DEVON.

You know my caſtle is not hence far diſtant.
Thither I ſped: and in a Daniſh habit
The trenches paſſing, by a ſecret way,
Known to myſelf alone, emerg'd at once
Amid my joyful ſoldiers. There I found
A generous few, the veteran, hardy gleanings
Of many a hapleſs fight. They with a fierce
Heroic fire inſpirited each other;
Reſolv'd on death, diſdaining to ſurvive
Their deareſt country.—"If we fall," I cry'd,
"Let us not tamely fall like paſſive cowards!
"No: let us live—or let us die, like men!
"Come on, my friends: to Alfred we will cut
"Our glorious way; or, as we nobly periſh,
"Will offer to the genius of our country
"Whole hecatombs of Danes."—As if one ſoul
Had mov'd them all, around their heads they flaſh'd
Their flaming faulchions—"Lead us to thoſe Danes!—
"Our country!—vengeance!" was the general cry.
Strait on the careleſs drowſy camp we ruſh'd:
And rapid, as the flame devours the ſtubble,
Bore down the heartleſs Danes. With this ſucceſs
Our enterprize increas'd. Not now contented
To hew a paſſage thro' the flying herd;
We, unremitting, urg'd a total rout.

The valiant Hubba bites the bloody field,
With twice ſix hundred Danes around him ſtrow'd.

ALFRED.

My glorious friend!—this action has reſtor'd
Our ſinking country.—What reward can equal
A deed ſo great?—Is not yon pictur'd *Raven*
Their famous magic ſtandard—Emblem fit
To ſpeak the ſavage genius of the people—
That oft has ſcatter'd on our troops diſmay,
And feeble conſternation?

DEVON.

'Tis the ſame.
Wrought by the ſiſters of the Daniſh king,
Of furious Ivar, in a midnight hour:
While the ſick moon, at their enchanted ſong,
Wrapt in pale tempeſt, labour'd thro' the clouds,
The *Demons* of deſtruction then, they ſay,
Were all abroad, and mixing with the woof
Their baleful power: the ſiſters ever ſung;
"Shake, ſtandard, ſhake, this ruin on our foes!"

HERMIT.

So theſe infernal powers, with rays of truth,
Still deck their fables, to delude who truſt them.

ALFRED.

But where, my noble couſin, are the reſt
Of your brave troops?

DEVON.

On t'other ſide the ſtream,
That half incloſes this retreat, I left them.
Rous'd from the fear, with which it was congeal'd
As in a froſt, the country pours amain.

The ſpirit of our anceſtors is up,
The ſpirit of the Free! and with a voice
That breathes ſucceſs, they all demand their king.

ALFRED.

Quick, let us join them, and improve their ardor.
We cannot be too haſty to ſecure
The glances of occaſion.

SCENE the Laſt.

To them CORIN, EMMA, *kneeling to* ALFRED.

CORIN.

Good my Liege,
Pardon the poor unequal entertainment,
Which we, unknowing—

ALFRED.

Riſe, my honeſt ſhepherd,
I came to thee a peaſant, not a prince:
Thy rural entertainment was ſincere,
Plain, hoſpitable, kind: ſuch as, I hope,
Will ever mark the manners of this nation.
You friendly lodg'd me, when by all deſerted:
And ſhall have ample recompence.

CORIN.

One boon
Is all I crave.

ALFRED.

Good ſhepherd, ſpeak thy wiſh.

CORIN.

Permiſſion, in your wars, to ſerve your Grace:
For, tho' here loſt in ſolitary ſhades,

A ſimple ſwain, I bear an Engliſh heart:
A heart that burns with rage to ſee thoſe Danes,
Thoſe foreign ruffians, thoſe inhuman pirates,
Oft our inferiors prov'd, thus lord it o'er us.

ALFRED.

Brave countryman, come on. 'Tis ſuch as thou,
Who from affection ſerve, and free-born zeal,
To guard whate'er is dear and ſacred to them,
That are a king's beſt honour and defence.

EMMA *ſings the following*

SONG.

If thoſe, who live in ſhepherd's bower,
Preſs not the rich and ſtately bed:
The new-mown hay and breathing flower
A ſofter couch beneath them ſpread.

If thoſe, who ſit at ſhepherd's board,
Sooth not their taſte by wanton art;
They take what Nature's gift afford,
And take it with a chearful heart.

If thoſe, who drain the ſhepherd's bowl,
No high and ſparkling wines can boaſt;
With wholeſome cups they chear the ſoul,
And crown them with the village toaſt.

If thoſe, who join in ſhepherd's ſport,
Gay-dancing on the daiſy'd ground,
Have not the ſplendor of a court;
Yet love adorns the merry round.

ALFRED.

My lov'd Eltruda! thou ſhalt here remain,
With gentle Emma, and this reverend hermit.
Ye ſilver ſtreams, that murmuring wind around
This duſky ſpot, to you I truſt my all!

O cloſe around her, woods! for her, ye vales,
Throw forth your flowers, your ſofteſt lap diffuſe!
And *Thou!* whoſe ſecret and expanſive hand
Moves all the ſprings of this vaſt univerſe:
Whoſe government aſtoniſhes; who here,
In a few hours, beyond our utmoſt hope,
Beyond our thought, yet doubting, haſt clear'd up
The ſtorm of fate: preſerve what thy kind will,
Thy bountiful appointment, makes ſo dear
To human hearts! preſerve my queen and children!
Preſerve the hopes of England! while I go
To finiſh thy great work, and ſave my country.

ELTRUDA.

Go, pay the debt of honour to the public.
If ever woman, Alfred, lov'd her huſband
More fondly than herſelf, I claim that virtue,
That heart-felt happineſs. Yet, by our loves
I ſwear, that in a glorious death with thee
I rather would be wrapt, than live long years
To charm thee from the rugged paths of honour:
So much I think thee born for beauteous deeds,
And the bright courſe of glory.

ALFRED.

Matchleſs woman!
Love, at thy voice, is kindled to ambition.
Be this my deareſt triumph, to approve me
A huſband worthy of the beſt Eltruda.

HERMIT.

Behold, my lord, our venerable Bard,
Aged and blind, him whom the Muſes favour.
Yet ere you go, in our lov'd country's praiſe,
That nobleſt theme, hear what his rapture breathes.

An ODE.

When Britain firſt, at Heaven's command
Aroſe from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels ſung *this* ſtrain:
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
"Britons never will be ſlaves."

The nations, not ſo bleſt as thee,
Muſt, in their turns, to tyrants fall:
While thou ſhalt flouriſh, great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
"Rule, &c."

Still more majeſtic ſhalt thou riſe,
More dreadful from each foreign ſtroke:
As the loud blaſt that tears the ſkies,
Serves but to root thy native oak.
"Rule, &c."

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er ſhall tame:
All their attempts to bend thee down,
Will but arouſe thy generous flame;
But work their woe, and thy renown.
"Rule, &c."

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities ſhall with commerce ſhine:
All thine ſhall be the ſubject main:
And every ſhore it circles thine.
"Rule, &c."

The Muſes, ſtill with Freedom found,
Shall to thy happy coaſt repair:
Bleſt iſle! with matchleſs beauty crown'd,
And manly hearts to guard the fair.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
"Britons never will be ſlaves."

HERMIT.

Alfred, go forth! lead on the radiant years,
To thee reveal'd in viſion.—Lo! they riſe!
Lo! patriots, heroes, ſages, crowd to birth:
And bards to ſing them in immortal verſe!
I ſee thy commerce, Britain, graſp the world:
All nations ſerve thee; every foreign flood,
Subjected pays its tribute to the Thames.
Thither the golden South obedient pours
His ſunny treaſures: thither the ſoft Eaſt
Her ſpices, delicacies, gentle gifts:
And thither his rough trade the ſtormy North.
See, where beyond the vaſt Atlantic ſurge,
By boldeſt keels untouch'd, a dreadful ſpace!
Shores, yet unfound, ariſe! in youthful prime,
With towering foreſts, mighty rivers crown'd:
Theſe ſtoop to Britain's thunder. This new world,
Shook to its centre, trembles at her name:
And there her ſons, with aim exalted, ſow
The ſeeds of riſing empire, arts, and arms.

Britons, proceed, the ſubject Deep command,
Awe with your navies every hoſtile land.
Vain are their threats, their armies all are vain:
They rule the balanc'd world, who rule the main.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA,

A

TRAGEDY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Play is conſiderably ſhortened in the performance; but I hope it will not be diſagreeable to the Reader to ſee it as it was at firſt written; there being a great difference betwixt a play in the cloſet, and upon the ſtage.

TO

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

FREDERICK,

PRINCE OF WALES.

SIR,

THE honour your ROYAL HIGHNESS has done me in the protection you was pleased to give to this tragedy, emboldens me to lay it now at your feet, and beg your permission to publish it under your Royal patronage. The favouring and protecting of letters has been, in all ages and countries, one distinguishing mark of a great prince; and that with good reason, not only as it shews a justness of taste and elevation of mind, but as the influence of such a protection, by exciting good writers to labour with more emulation in the improvement of their several talents, not a little contributes to the embellishment and instruction of society. But of all the different species of writing, none has such an effect upon the lives and manners of men, as the dramatic; and therefore, that of all others most deserves the attention of princes; who, by a judicious approbation of such pieces as tend to promote all

public and private virtue, may, more than by any coercive methods, ſecure the purity of the ſtage; and in conſequence thereof greatly advance the morals and politeneſs of their people. How eminently your ROYAL HIGHNESS has always extended your favour and patronage to every art and ſcience, and in a particular manner to dramatic performances, is too well known to the world for me to mention it here. Allow me only to wiſh, that what I have now the honour to offer to your ROYAL HIGHNESS, may be judged not unworthy of your protection, at leaſt in the *ſentiments* which it inculcates. A warm and grateful ſenſe of your goodneſs to me, makes me deſirous to ſeize every occaſion of declaring in public, with what profound reſpect and dutiful attachment I am,

SIR,

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Moſt obliged,

Moſt obedient, and

Moſt devoted Servant,

JAMES THOMSON.

PROLOGUE.

BOLD is the man! who, in this nicer age,
Preſumes to tread the chaſte corrected ſtage.
Now, with gay tinſel arts, we can no more
Conceal the want of Nature's ſterling ore.
Our ſpells are vaniſh'd, broke our magic wand,
That us'd to waft you over ſea and land.
Before your *light* the fairy people fade,
The demons fly—The ghoſt itſelf is laid.
In vain of martial ſcenes the loud alarms,
The mighty prompter thundering out to arms,
The playhouſe poſſe clattering from afar,
The cloſe-wedg'd battle, and the din of war.
Now, even the ſenate ſeldom we convene;
The yawning fathers nod behind the ſcene.
Your taſte rejects the glittering falſe ſublime,
To ſigh in metaphor, and die in rhyme.
High *rant* is tumbled from his gallery throne:
Deſcription, dreams—nay, ſimilies are gone.

What ſhall we then? to pleaſe you how deviſe
Whoſe judgment ſits not in your ears and eyes?
Thrice happy! could we catch great *Shakeſpear*'s art,
To trace the deep receſſes of the heart;
His ſimple plain ſublime, to which is given
To ſtrike the ſoul with darted flame from heaven:
Could we awake ſoft *Otway*'s tender woe,
The pomp of verſe, and golden lines of *Rowe*.

We to your hearts apply: let them attend;
Before their ſilent candid bar we bend.
If warm'd, they liſten, 'tis our nobleſt praiſe;
If cold, they wither all the Muſe's bays.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

TANCRED, Count of Leece, -	Mr. GARRICK.
MATTEO SIFFREDI, Lord High Chancellor of Sicily, - -	Mr. SHERIDAN.
Earl OSMOND, Lord High Conſtable of Sicily, - -	Mr. DELANE.
RODOLPHO, Friend to Tancred, and Captain of the Guards, -	Mr. HAVARD.
SIGISMUNDA, Daughter of Siffredi,	Mrs. CIBBER.
LAURA, Sifter of Rodolpho, and Friend to Sigiſmunda, - -	Miſs BUDGEL.

Barons, Officers, Guards, *&c.*

SCENE, The City of Palermo in Sicily.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA.

AH fatal day to Sicily! The king
Approaches his laſt moments!

LAURA.

So 'tis fear'd.

SIGISMUNDA.

The death of thoſe diſtinguiſh'd by their ſtation,
But by their virtue more, awakes the mind
To ſolemn dread, and ſtrikes a ſaddening awe:
Not that we grieve for them, but for ourſelves,
Left to the toil of life—And yet the beſt
Are, by the playful children of this world,
At once forgot, as they had never been.
Laura, 'tis ſaid—the heart is ſometimes charg'd
With a prophetic ſadneſs: ſuch, methinks,
Now hangs on mine. The king's approaching death

Suggeſts a thouſand fears. What troubles thence
May throw the ſtate once more into confuſion,
What ſudden changes in my father's houſe
May riſe, and part me from my deareſt Tancred,
Alarms my thought.

LAURA.

The fears of love-ſick fancy!
Perverſely buſy to torment itſelf.
But be aſſur'd, your father's ſteady friendſhip,
Join'd to a certain genius, that commands,
Not kneels to fortune, will ſupport and cheriſh,
Here in the public eye of Sicily,
This—I may call him—his adopted ſon,
The noble Tancred, form'd to all his virtues.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah form'd to charm his daughter!—This fair morn
Has tempted far the chace. Is he not yet
Return'd.

LAURA.

No.—When your father to the king,
Who now expiring lies, was call'd in haſte,
He ſent each way his meſſengers to find him;
With ſuch a look of ardor and impatience,
As if this near event was to count Tancred
Of more importance than I comprehend.

SIGISMUNDA.

There lies, my Laura, o'er my Tancred's birth
A cloud I cannot pierce. With princely accoſt,
Nay, with reſpect, which oft I have obſerv'd,
Stealing at times ſubmiſſive o'er his features,
In Belmont's woods my father rear'd this youth—
Ah woods! where firſt my artleſs boſom learnt

The ſighs of love.—He gives him out the ſon
Of an old friend, a baron of Apulia,
Who in the late cruſado bravely fell.
But then 'tis ſtrange; is all his family
As well as father dead? and all their friends,
Except my ſire, the generous good Siffredi?
Had he a mother, ſiſter, brother, left,
The laſt remain of kindred; with what pride,
What rapture, might they fly o'er earth and ſea,
To claim this riſing honour of their blood!
This bright unknown! this all-accompliſh'd youth!
Who charms—too much—the heart of Sigiſmunda!
Laura, perhaps your brother knows him better,
The friend and partner of his freeſt hours.
What ſays Rodolpho? Does he truly credit
This ſtory of his birth?

LAURA.

He has ſometimes,
Like you, his doubts; yet, when maturely weigh'd,
Believes it true. As for lord Tancred's ſelf,
He never entertain'd the ſlighteſt thought
That verg'd to doubt; but oft laments his ſtate,
By cruel fortune ſo ill-pair'd to yours.

SIGISMUNDA.

Merit like his, the fortune of the mind,
Beggars all wealth—Then, to your brother, Laura,
He talks of me?

LAURA.

Of nothing elſe. Howe'er
The talk begin, it ends with Sigiſmunda.
Their morning, noontide, and their evening walks
Are full of you; and all the woods of Belmont
Inamour'd with your name——

SIGISMUNDA.

Away, my friend;
You flatter——yet the dear deluſion charms.

LAURA.

No, Sigiſmunda, 'tis the ſtricteſt truth,
Nor half the truth, I tell you. Even with fondneſs
My brother talks for ever of the paſſion
That fires young Tancred's breaſt. So much it ſtrikes him,
He praiſes love as if he were a lover.
He blames the falſe purſuits of vagrant youth,
Calls them gay folly, a miſtaken ſtruggle
Againſt beſt-judging Nature. Heaven, he ſays,
In laviſh bounty form'd the heart for love;
In love included all the finer ſeeds
Of honour, virtue, friendſhip, pureſt bliſs——

SIGISMUNDA.

Virtuous Rodolpho!

LAURA.

Then his pleaſing theme
He varies to the praiſes of your lover——

SIGISMUNDA.

And what, my Laura, ſays he on the ſubject?

LAURA.

He ſays, that, tho' he were not nobly born,
Nature has form'd him noble, generous, brave,
Truly magnanimous, and warmly ſcorning
Whatever bears the ſmalleſt taint of baſeneſs:
That every eaſy virtue is his own;
Not learnt by painful labour, but inſpir'd,
Implanted in his ſoul—Chiefly one charm
He in his graceful character obſerves;

That tho' his paſſions burn with high impatience,
And ſometimes, from a noble heat of nature,
Are ready to fly off; yet the leaſt check
Of ruling reaſon brings them back to temper,
And gentle ſoftneſs.

SIGISMUNDA.

True! O true, Rodolpho!
Bleſt be thy kindred worth for loving his!
He is all warmth, all amiable fire,
All quick heroic ardor! temper'd ſoft
With gentleneſs of heart, and manly reaſon!
If Virtue were to wear a human form,
To light it with her dignity and flame,
Then ſoft'ning mix her ſmiles and tender graces;
O ſhe would chuſe the perſon of my Tancred!
Go on, my friend, go on, and ever praiſe him;
The ſubject knows no bounds, nor can I tire,
While my breaſt trembles to that ſweeteſt muſic!
The heart of woman taſtes no truer joy,
Is never flatter'd with ſuch dear enchantment——
'Tis more than ſelfiſh vanity—as when
She hears the praiſes of the man ſhe loves——

LAURA.

Madam, your father comes.

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIFFREDI.

[To an Attendant as he enters.

Lord Tancred then
Is found?

ATTENDANT.

My lord, he quickly will be here.
I ſcarce could keep before him, tho' he bid me
Speed on, to ſay he would attend your orders.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis well—retire—You, too, my daughter, leave me.

SIGISMUNDA.

I go, my father—But how fares the king?

SIFFREDI.

He is no more. Gone to that awful ſtate,
Where kings the crown wear only of their virtues.

SIGISMUNDA.

How bright muſt then be his!—This ſtroke is ſudden.
He was this morning well, when to the chace
Lord Tancred went.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis true. But at his years
Death gives ſhort notice—Drooping nature then,
Without a guſt of pain to ſhake it, falls.
His death, my daughter, was that happy period
Which few attain. The duties of his day
Were all diſcharg'd, and gratefully enjoy'd
It's nobleſt bleſſings; calm as evening ſkies,
Was his pure mind, and lighted up with hopes
That open heaven; when, for his laſt long ſleep
Timely prepar'd, a laſſitude of life,
A pleaſing wearineſs of mortal joy,
Fell on his ſoul, and down he ſunk to reſt.
O may my death be ſuch!——He but one wiſh
Left unfulfill'd, which was to ſee count Tancred——

SIGISMUNDA.

To ſee count Tancred!—Pardon me, my lord——

SIFFREDI.

For what, my daughter?—But, with ſuch emotion,
Why did you ſtart at mention of count Tancred?

SIGISMUNDA.

Nothing—I only hop'd the dying king
Might mean to make ſome generous juſt proviſion
For this your worthy charge, this noble orphan.

SIFFREDI.

And he has done it largely—Leave me now—
I want ſome private conference with lord Tancred.

SCENE III.

SIFFREDI *alone.*

My doubts are but too true—If theſe old eyes
Can trace the marks of love, a mutual paſſion
Has ſeiz'd, I fear, my daughter and this prince,
My ſovereign now—Should it be ſo? Ah there,
There lurks a brooding tempeſt, that may ſhake
My long concerted ſcheme, to ſettle firm
The public peace and welfare, which the king
Has made the prudent baſis of his will——
Away! unworthy views! you ſhall not tempt me!
Nor intereſt, nor ambition ſhall ſeduce
My fixt reſolve——periſh the ſelfiſh thought,
Which our own good prefers to that of millions!—
He comes—my king—unconſcious of his fortune.

SCENE IV.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI.

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi, in your looks I read,
Confirm'd, the mournful news that fly abroad
From tongue to tongue—We then, at laſt, have loſt
The good old king?

SIFFREDI.

Yes, we have loſt a father!
The greateſt bleſſing Heaven beſtows on mortals,
And ſeldom found amidſt theſe wilds of time.
A good, a worthy king!—Hear me, my Tancred,
And I will tell thee, in a few plain words,
How he deſerv'd that beſt, that glorious title.
'Tis nought complex, 'tis clear as truth and virtue.
He lov'd his people, deem'd them all his children;
The good exalted, and depreſs'd the bad.
He ſpurn'd the flattering crew, with ſcorn rejected
Their ſmooth advice that only means themſelves,
Their ſchemes to aggrandize him into baſeneſs:
Nor did he leſs diſdain the ſecret breath,
The whiſper'd tale, that blights a virtuous name.
He ſought alone the good of thoſe for whom
He was entruſted with the ſovereign power:
Well knowing that a people in their rights
And induſtry protected; living ſafe
Beneath the ſacred ſhelter of the laws,
Encourag'd in their genius, arts, and labours,
And happy each as he himſelf deſerves,

Are ne'er ungrateful. With unſparing hand
They will for him provide: their filial love
And confidence are his unfailing treaſure,
And every honeſt man his faithful guard.

TANCRED.

A general face of grief o'erſpreads the city.
I mark'd the people, as I hither came,
In crowds aſſembled, ſtruck with ſilent ſorrow,
And pouring forth the nobleſt praiſe of tears.
Thoſe, whom remembrance of their former woes,
And long experience of the vain illuſions
Of youthful hope, had into wiſe conſent
And fear of change corrected, wrung their hands,
And often caſting up their eyes to heaven,
Gave ſign of ſad conjecture. Others ſhew'd,
Athwart their grief, or real or affected,
A gleam of expectation, from what chance
And change might bring. A mingled murmur run
Along the ſtreets; and, from the lonely court
Of him who can no more aſſiſt their fortunes,
I ſaw the courtier-fry, with eager haſte,
All hurrying to Conſtantia.

SIFFREDI.

Noble youth!
I joy to hear from thee theſe juſt reflections,
Worthy of riper years—But if they ſeek
Conſtantia, truſt me, they miſtake their courſe.

TANCRED.

How! is ſhe not, my lord, the late king's ſiſter,
Heir to the crown of Sicily? the laſt
Of our fam'd Norman line, and now our queen?

SIFFREDI.

Tancred, 'tis true; ſhe is the late king's ſiſter,
The ſole ſurviving offspring of that tyrant
William the Bad—ſo for his vices ſtil'd;
Who ſpilt much noble blood, and ſore oppreſs'd
Th' exhauſted land: whence grievous wars aroſe,
And many a dire convulſion ſhook the ſtate,
When he, whoſe death Sicilia mourns to-day,
William, who has and well deſerv'd the name
Of Good, ſucceeding to his father's throne,
Reliev'd his country's woes—But to return—
She is the late king's ſiſter, born ſome months
After the tyrant's death, but not next heir.

TANCRED.

You much ſurpriſe me—May I then preſume
To aſk who is?

SIFFREDI.

Come nearer, noble Tancred,
Son of my care! I muſt, on this occaſion,
Conſult thy generous heart; which, when conducted
By rectitude of mind and honeſt virtues,
Gives better counſel than the hoary head—
Then know, their lives a prince, here in Palermo,
The lineal offspring of our famous hero,
Roger the Firſt.

TANCRED.

Great Heaven!—How far remov'd
From that our mighty founder?

SIFFREDI.

His great grandſon:
Sprung from his eldeſt ſon, who died untimely,
Before his father.

TANCRED.

Ha! the prince you mean
Is he not Manfred's ſon? The generous, brave,
Unhappy Manfred! whom the tyrant William
You juſt now mention'd, not content to ſpoil
Of his paternal crown, threw into fetters,
And infamouſly murder'd?

SIFFREDI.

Yes—the ſame.

TANCRED.

By Heavens! I joy to find our Norman reign,
The world's ſole light amidſt theſe barbarous ages!
Yet rears its head; and ſhall not, from the lance,
Paſs to the feeble diſtaff—But this prince
Where has he lain conceal'd?

SIFFREDI.

The late good king,
By noble pity mov'd, contriv'd to ſave him
From his dire father's unrelenting rage,
And had him rear'd in private, as became
His birth and hopes, with high and princely nurture.
Till now, too young to rule a troubled ſtate,
By civil broils moſt miſerably torn,
He in his ſafe retreat has lain conceal'd,
His birth and fortune to himſelf unknown;
But when the dying king to me entruſted,
As to the chancellor of the realm, his will,
His ſucceſſor he nam'd him.

TANCRED.

Happy youth!
He then will triumph o'er his father's foes,
O'er haughty Oſmond, and the tyrant's daughter.

SIFFREDI.

Ay, that is what I dread—that heat of youth;
There lurks, I fear, perdition to the ſtate.
I dread the horrors of rekindled war:
Tho' dead, the tyrant ſtill is to be fear'd;
His daughter's party ſtill is ſtrong, and numerous:
Her friend, earl Oſmond, conſtable of Sicily,
Experienc'd, brave, high-born, of mighty intereſt.
Better the prince and princeſs ſhould by marriage
Unite their friends, their intereſt and their claims;
Then will the peace and welfare of the land
On a firm baſis riſe.

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi,
If by myſelf I of this prince may judge,
That ſcheme will ſcarce ſucceed—Your prudent age
In vain will counſel, if the heart forbid it—
But wherefore fear? The right is clearly his;
And, under your direction, with each man
Of worth, and ſtedfaſt loyalty, to back
At once the king's appointment and his birthright,
There is no ground for fear. They have great odds,
Againſt th' aſtoniſh'd ſons of violence,
Who fight with awful juſtice on their ſide.
All Sicily will rouſe, all faithful hearts
Will range themſelves around prince Manfred's ſon.
For me, I here devote me to the ſervice
Of this young prince; I every drop of blood
Will loſe with joy, with tranſport in his cauſe—
Pardon my warmth—but that, my lord, will never
To this deciſion come—Then find the prince;
Loſe not a moment to awaken in him
The royal ſoul. Perhaps he now deſponding

Pines in a corner, and laments his fortune;
That in the narrower bounds of private life
He muſt confine his aims, thoſe ſwelling virtues
Which from his noble father he inherits.

SIFFREDI.

Perhaps, regardleſs, in the common bane
Of youth he melts, in vanity and love.
But if the ſeeds of virtue glow within him,
I will awake a higher ſenſe, a love
That graſps the loves and happineſs of millions.

TANCRED.

Why that ſurmiſe? Or ſhould he love, Siffredi,
I doubt not, it is nobly, which will raiſe
And animate his virtues—O permit me
To plead the cauſe of youth—Their virtue oft
In pleaſure's ſoft enchantment lull'd a while
Forgets itſelf; it ſleeps and gayly dreams,
Till great occaſion rouſe it: Then all flame,
It walks abroad, with heighten'd ſoul and vigour,
And by the change aſtoniſhes the world.
Even with a kind of ſympathy, I feel
The joy that waits this prince; when all the powers,
Th' expanding heart can wiſh, of doing good;
Whatever ſwells ambition, or exalts
The human ſoul into divine emotions,
All crowd at once upon him.

SIFFREDI.

Ah, my Tancred,
Nothing ſo eaſy as in ſpeculation,
And at a diſtance ſeen, the courſe of honour,
A fair delightful champain ſtrew'd with flowers.
But when the practice comes; when our fond paſſions,

Pleaſure, and pride, and ſelf-indulgence, throw
Their magic duſt around, the proſpect roughens:
Then dreadful paſſes, craggy mountains riſe,
Cliffs to be ſcal'd, and torrents to be ſtemm'd:
Then toil enſues, and perſeverance ſtern;
And endleſs combats with our groſſer ſenſe,
Oft loſt, and oft renew'd; and generous pain
For others felt; and, harder leſſon ſtill!
Our honeſt bliſs for others ſacrific'd;
And all the rugged taſk of virtue quails
The ſtouteſt heart of common reſolution.
Few get above this turbid ſcene of ſtrife.
Few gain the ſummit, breathe that pureſt air,
That heavenly ether, which untroubled ſees
The ſtorm of vice and paſſion rage below.

TANCRED.

Moſt true, my lord. But why thus augur ill?
You ſeem to doubt this prince. I know him not.
Yet oh, methinks, my heart could anſwer for him!
The juncture is ſo high, ſo ſtrong the gale
That blows from heaven, as thro' the deadeſt ſoul
Might breathe the godlike energy of virtue.

SIFFREDI.

Hear him, immortal ſhades of his great fathers!—
Forgive me, Sir, this trial of your heart:
Thou! Thou art he!

TANCRED.

Siffredi!

SIFFREDI.

Tancred, thou!
Thou art the man, of all the many thouſands

That toil upon the boſom of this iſle
By Heaven elected to command the reſt,
To rule, protect them, and to make them happy!

TANCRED.

Manfred my father! I the laſt ſupport
Of the fam'd Norman line, that awes the world!
I! who this morning wander'd forth an orphan,
Outcaſt of all but thee, my ſecond father!
Thus call'd to glory! to the firſt great lot
Of human kind!—O wonder-working Hand
That, in majeſtic ſilence, ſways at will
The mighty movements of unbounded nature;
O grant me, Heaven! the virtues to ſuſtain
This awful burden of ſo many heroes!
Let me not be exalted into ſhame,
Set up the worthleſs pageant of vain grandeur.
Meantime I thank the juſtice of the king,
Who has my right bequeath'd me. Thee, Siffredi,
I thank thee—O I ne'er enough can thank thee!
Yes, thou haſt been—thou art—ſhalt be my father!
Thou ſhalt direct my unexperienc'd years,
Shalt be the ruling head, and I the hand.

SIFFREDI.

It is enough for me—to ſee my ſovereign
Aſſert his virtues, and maintain his honour.

TANCRED.

I think, my lord, you ſaid the king committed
To you his will. I hope it is not clogg'd
With any baſe conditions, any clauſe,
To tyrannize my heart, and to Conſtantia
Enſlave my hand devoted to another.
The hint you juſt now gave of that alliance,

You muſt imagine, wakes my fear. But know,
In this alone I will not bear diſpute,
Not even from thee, Siffredi!—Let the council
Be ſtrait aſſembled, and the will there open'd:
Thence iſſue ſpeedy orders to convene,
This day ere noon, the ſenate: where thoſe barons,
Who now are in Palermo, will attend,
To pay their ready homage to the king,
Their rightful king, who claims his native crown,
And will not be a king by deeds and parchments.

SIFFREDI.

I go, my liege. But once again permit me
To tell you——Now, now, is the trying criſis,
That muſt determine of your future reign.
O with heroic rigour watch your heart!
And to the ſovereign duties of the king,
Th' unequal'd pleaſures of a God on earth,
Submit the common joys, the common paſſions,
Nay, even the virtues of the private man.

TANCRED.

Of that no more. They not oppoſe, but aid,
Invigorate, cheriſh, and reward each other.
The kind all-ruling Wiſdom is no tyrant.

SCENE V.

TANCRED *alone.*

Now, generous Sigiſmunda, comes my turn
To ſhew my love was not of thine unworthy,
When fortune bade me bluſh to look to thee.
But what is fortune to the wiſh of love?
A miſerable bankrupt! O 'tis poor,

'Tis ſcanty all, whate'er we can beſtow!
The wealth of kings is wretchedneſs and want!—
Quick, let me find her! taſte that higheſt joy,
Th' exalted heart can know, the mixt effuſion
Of gratitude and love!—Behold, ſhe comes!

SCENE VI.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

My fluttering ſoul was all on wing to find thee,
My love! my Sigiſmunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

O my Tancred!
Tell me, what means this myſtery and gloom
That lowrs around? Juſt now, involv'd in thought,
My father ſhot athwart me—You, my lord,
Seem ſtrangely mov'd—I fear ſome dark event
From the king's death to trouble our repoſe,
That tender calm we in the woods of Belmont
So happily enjoy'd——Explain this hurry,
What means it? Say.

TANCRED.

It means that we are happy!
Beyond our moſt romantic wiſhes happy!

SIGISMUNDA.

You but perplex me more.

TANCRED.

It means, my faireſt!
That thou art queen of Sicily; and I
The happieſt of mankind! than monarch more!

Becauſe with thee I can adorn my throne.
Manfred, who fell by tyrant William's rage,
Fam'd Roger's lineal iſſue, was my father.

[*Pauſing.*

You droop, my love; dejected on a ſudden;
You ſeem to mourn my fortune—The ſoft tear
Springs in thy eye—O let me kiſs it off——
Why this, my Sigiſmunda?

SIGISMUNDA.

Royal Tancred,
None at your glorious fortune can like me
Rejoice;—yet me alone, of all Sicilians,
It makes unhappy.

TANCRED.

I ſhould hate it then!
Should throw, with ſcorn, the ſplendid ruin from me!—
No, Sigiſmunda, 'tis my hope with thee
To ſhare it, whence it draws its richeſt value.

SIGISMUNDA.

You are my ſovereign—I at humble diſtance——

TANCRED.

Thou art my queen! the ſovereign of my ſoul!
You never reign'd with ſuch triumphant luſtre,
Such winning charms as now; yet, thou art ſtill
The dear, the tender, generous Sigiſmunda!
Who, with a heart exalted far above
Thoſe ſelfiſh views that charm the common breaſt,
Stoop'd from the height of life and courted beauty,
Then, then, to love me, when I ſeem'd of fortune
The hopeleſs outcaſt, when I had no friend,
None to protect and own me but thy father.
And would'ſt thou claim all goodneſs to thyſelf?
Canſt thou thy Tancred deem ſo dully form'd,

Of ſuch groſs clay, juſt as I reach the point—
A point my wildeſt hopes could never image—
In that great moment, full of every virtue,
That I ſhould then ſo mean a traitor prove
To the beſt bliſs and honour of mankind,
So much diſgrace the human heart, as then,
For the dead form of flattery and pomp,
The faithleſs joys of courts, to quit kind truth,
The cordial ſweets of friendſhip and of love,
The life of life! my all, my Sigiſmunda!
I could upbraid thy fears, call them unkind,
Cruel, unjuſt, an outrage to my heart,
Did they not ſpring from love.

SIGISMUNDA.

Think not, my lord,
That to ſuch vulgar doubts I can deſcend.
Your heart, I know, diſdains the little thought
Of changing with the vain external change
Of circumſtance and fortune. Rather thence
It would, with riſing ardour, greatly feel
A noble pride to ſhew itſelf the ſame.
But, ah! the hearts of kings are not their own.
There is a haughty duty that ſubjects them
To chains of ſtate, to wed the public welfare,
And not indulge the tender private virtues.
Some high-deſcended princeſs, who will bring
New power and intereſt to your throne, demands
Your royal hand—perhaps Conſtantia——

TANCRED.

She!
O name her not! Were I this moment free,
And diſengag'd as he who never felt

The powerful eye of beauty, never ſigh'd
For matchleſs worth like thine, I ſhould abhor
All thoughts of that alliance. Her fell father
Moſt baſely murder'd mine; and ſhe, his daughter,
Supported by his barbarous party ſtill,
His pride inherits, his imperious ſpirit,
And inſolent pretenſions to my throne.
And canſt thou deem me then ſo poorly tame,
So cool a traitor to my father's blood,
As from the prudent cowardice of ſtate
E'er to ſubmit to ſuch a baſe propoſal?
Deteſted thought! O doubly, doubly hateful!
From the two ſtrongeſt paſſions; from averſion
To this Conſtantia—and from love to thee.

Cuſtom, 'tis true, a venerable tyrant,
O'er ſervile man extends her blind dominion:
The pride of kings enſlaves them; their ambition,
Or intereſt, lords it o'er the better paſſions.
But vain their talk, maſk'd under ſpecious words
Of ſtation, duty, and of public good:
They whom juſt Heaven has to a throne exalted,
To guard the rights and liberties of others,
What duty binds them to betray their own?
For me, my free-born heart ſhall bear no dictates,
But thoſe of truth and honour; wear no chains,
But the dear chains of love and Sigiſmunda!
Or if indeed my choice muſt be directed
By views of public good, whom ſhall I chuſe
So fit to grace, to dignify a crown,
And beam ſweet mercy on a happy people,
As thee, my love? whom place upon my throne
But thee, deſcended from the good Siffredi!

'Tis fit that heart be thine, which drew from him
Whate'er can make it worthy thy acceptance.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ceaſe, ceaſe, to raiſe my hopes above my duty.
Charm me no more, my Tancred!—O that we
In thoſe bleſt woods, where firſt you won my ſoul,
Had paſs'd our gentle days: far from the toil
And pomp of courts! Such is the wiſh of love;
Of love, that, with delightful weakneſs, knows
No bliſs and no ambition but itſelf.
But, in the world's full light, thoſe charming dreams,
Thoſe fond illuſions vaniſh. Awful duties,
The tyranny of men, even your own heart,
Where lurks a ſenſe your paſſion ſtifles now,
And proud imperious honour, call you from me.
'Tis all in vain—You cannot huſh a voice
That murmurs here—I muſt not be perſuaded!

TANCRED, *kneeling.*

Hear me, thou ſoul of all my hopes and wiſhes!
And witneſs, Heaven! prime ſource of love and joy!
Not a whole warring world combin'd againſt me;
Its pride, its ſplendor, its impoſing forms,
Nor intereſt, nor ambition, nor the face
Of ſolemn ſtate, not even thy father's wiſdom,
Shall ever ſhake my faith to Sigiſmunda!

[*Trumpets and acclamations heard.*

But, hark! the public voice to duties call me,
Which with unweary'd zeal I will diſcharge;
And thou, yes thou, ſhalt be my bright reward—
Yet—ere I go—to huſh thy lovely fears,
Thy delicate objections——— [*writes his name.*
Take this blank,
Sign'd with my name, and give it to thy father;

Tell him, 'tis my command it be fill'd up
With a moſt ſtrict and ſolemn marriage-contract.
How dear each tie! how charming to my ſoul!
That more unites me to my Sigiſmunda.

For thee and for my people's good to live,
Is all the bliſs which ſovereign power can give.

ACT II. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI, *alone.*

SO far 'tis well—The late king's will proceeds
Upon the plan I counſel'd; that prince Tancred
Shall make Conſtantia partner of his throne.
O great, O wiſh'd event! whence the dire ſeeds
Of dark inteſtine broils, of civil war,
And all its dreadful miſeries and crimes,
Shall be for ever rooted from the land.
May theſe dim eyes, long blaſted by the rage
Of cruel faction and my country's woes,
Tir'd with the toils and vanities of life,
Behold this period, then be clos'd in peace!
But how this mighty obſtacle ſurmount,
Which love has thrown betwixt? Love, that diſturbs
The ſchemes of wiſdom ſtill; that, wing'd with paſſion,
Blind and impetuous in its fond purſuits,
Leaves the grey-headed reaſon far behind.
Alas! how frail the ſtate of human bliſs!
When even our honeſt paſſions oft deſtroy it.
I was to blame, in ſolitude and ſhades,
Infectious ſcenes! to truſt their youthful hearts.
Would I had mark'd the riſing flame! that now
Burns out with dangerous force—My daughter owns
Her paſſion for the king; ſhe trembling own'd it,
With prayers and tears and tender ſupplications,
That almoſt ſhook my firmneſs—And this blank,
Which his raſh fondneſs gave her, ſhews how much,
To what a wild extravagance he loves—
I ſee no means—it foils my deepeſt thought—

How to controul this madneſs of the king,
That wears the face of virtue, and will thence
Diſdain reſtraint, will from his generous heart
Borrow new rage, even ſpecioufly oppoſe
To reaſon reaſon—But it muſt be done.
My own advice, of which I more and more
Approve, the ſtrict conditions of the will,
Highly demand his marriage with Conſtantia;
Or elſe her party has a fair pretence——
And all, at once, is horror and confuſion——
How iſſue from this maze?—The crowding barons,
Here ſummon'd to the palace, meet already,
To pay their homage, and confirm the will.
On a few moments hangs the public fate,
On a few haſty moments—Ha! there ſhone
A gleam of hope—Yes—with this very paper
I yet will ſave him—Neceſſary means
For good and noble ends can ne'er be wrong.
In that reſiſtleſs, that peculiar caſe,
Deceit is truth and virtue—But how hold
This lion in the toil?—O I will form it
Of ſuch a fatal thread, twiſt it ſo ſtrong
With all the ties of honour and of duty,
That his moſt deſperate fury ſhall not break
The honeſt ſnare—Here is the royal hand—
I will beneath it write a perfect, full,
And abſolute agreement to the will;
Which read before the nobles of the realm
Aſſembled, in the ſacred face of Sicily,
Conſtantia preſent, every heart and eye
Fix'd on their monarch, every tongue applauding,
He muſt ſubmit, his dream of love muſt vaniſh—
It ſhall be done!——To me, I know, 'tis ruin;
But ſafety to the public, to the king.

I will not reaſon more, I will not liſten
Even to the voice of honour—No—'tis fix'd!
I here devote me for my prince and country;
Let them be ſafe, and let me nobly periſh!
Behold earl Oſmond comes; without whoſe aid
My ſchemes are all in vain.

SCENE II.

OSMOND, SIFFREDI.

OSMOND.

My lord Siffredi,
I from the council haſten'd to Conſtantia,
And have accompliſh'd what we there propos'd.
The princeſs to the will ſubmits her claims.
She with her preſence means to grace the ſenate,
And of your royal charge young Tancred's hand
Accept. At firſt, indeed, it ſhock'd her hopes
Of reigning ſole, this new ſurprizing ſcene
Of Manfred's ſon, appointed by the king
With her joint heir——But I ſo fully ſhew'd
The juſtice of the caſe, the public good
And ſure eſtabliſh'd peace which thence would riſe,
Join'd to the ſtrong neceſſity that urg'd her,
If on Sicilia's throne ſhe meant to ſit,
As to the wiſe diſpoſal of the will
Her high ambition tam'd: Methought, beſides,
I could diſcern that not from prudence merely
She to this choice ſubmitted.

SIFFREDI.

Noble Oſmond,
You have in this done to the public great

And ſignal ſervice. Yes, I muſt avow it;
This frank and ready inſtance of your zeal,
In ſuch a trying criſis of the ſtate,
When intereſt and ambition might have warp'd
Your views; I own, this truly generous virtue
Upbraids the raſhneſs of my former judgment.

OSMOND.

Siffredi, no.—To you belongs the praiſe;
The glorious work is yours. Had I not ſeiz'd,
Improv'd the wiſh'd occaſion to root out
Diviſion from the land, and ſave my country,
I had been baſe, been infamous for ever.
'Tis you, my lord, to whom the many thouſands,
That by the barbarous ſword of civil war
Had fallen inglorious, owe their lives; to you
The ſons of this fair iſle, from her firſt peers
Down to the ſwain who tills her golden plains,
Owe their ſafe homes, their ſoft domeſtic hours,
And thro' late time poſterity ſhall bleſs you,
You who advis'd this will—I bluſh to think
I have ſo long oppos'd the beſt good man
In Sicily——With what impartial care
Ought we to watch o'er prejudice and paſſion,
Nor truſt too much the jaundic'd eye of party!
Henceforth its vain deluſions I renounce,
Its hot determinations, that confine
All merit and all virtue to itſelf.
To yours I join my hand; with you will own
No intereſt and no party but my country.
Nor is your friendſhip only my ambition:
There is a dearer name, the name of father,
By which I ſhould rejoice to call Siffredi.
Your daughter's hand would to the public weal
Unite my private happineſs.

SIFFREDI.

My lord,
You have my glad conſent. To be allied
To your diſtinguiſh'd family, and merit,
I ſhall eſteem an honour. From my ſoul
I here embrace earl Oſmond as my friend,
And ſon.

OSMOND.

You make him happy. This aſſent,
So frank and warm, to what I long have wiſh'd,
Engages all my gratitude; at once,
In the firſt bloſſom, it matures our friendſhip,
I from this moment vow myſelf the friend
And zealous ſervant of Siffredi's houſe.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to the Court.*

OFFICER *to* SIFFREDI.

The king, my lord, demands your ſpeedy preſence.

SIFFREDI.

I will attend him ſtrait—Farewel, my lord:
The ſenate meets: there, a few moments hence,
I will rejoin you,

OSMOND.

There, my noble lord,
We will complete this ſalutary work,
Will there begin a new auſpicious æra.

SCENE III.

OSMOND *alone.*

Siffredi gives his daughter to my wiſhes—
But does ſhe give herſelf? Gay, young, and flatter'd,
Perhaps engag'd, will ſhe her youthful heart
Yield to my harſher, uncomplying years?
I am not form'd, by flattery and praiſe,
By ſighs and tears, and all the whining trade
Of love, to feed a fair one's vanity;
To charm at once and ſpoil her. Theſe ſoft arts
Nor ſuit my years nor temper; theſe be left
To boys and doating age. A prudent father,
By nature charg'd to guide and rule her choice,
Reſigns his daughter to a huſband's power,
Who with ſuperior dignity, with reaſon,
And manly tenderneſs, will ever love her;
Not firſt a kneeling ſlave, and then a tyrant.

SCENE IV.

OSMOND, BARONS.

OSMOND.

My lords, I greet you well. This wondrous day
Unites us all in amity and friendſhip.
We meet to-day with open hearts, and looks
Not gloom'd by party ſcouling on each other,
But all the children of one happy iſle,
The ſocial ſons of liberty. No pride,
No paſſion now, no thwarting views divide us:

Prince Manfred's line, at laſt, to William's join'd,
Combines us in one family of brothers.
This to the late good king's well-order'd will,
And wiſe Siffredi's generous care, we owe.
I truly give you joy. Firſt of you all,
I here renounce thoſe errors and diviſions
That have ſo long diſturb'd our peace, and ſeem'd,
Fermenting ſtill, to threaten new commotions—
By time inſtructed let us not diſdain
To quit miſtakes. We all, my lords, have err'd.
Men may, I find, be honeſt, tho' they differ.

FIRST BARON.

Who follows not, my lord, the fair example
You ſet us all, whate'er be his pretence,
Loves not with ſingle and unbias'd heart
His country as he ought.

SECOND BARON.

O beauteous Peace!
Sweet union of a ſtate! What elſe, but thou,
Gives ſafety, ſtrength, and glory to a people!
I bow, lord conſtable, beneath the ſnow
Of many years; yet in my breaſt revives
A youthful flame. Methinks, I ſee again
Thoſe gentle days renew'd, that bleſs'd our iſle,
Ere by this waſteful fury of diviſion,
Worſe than our Ætna's moſt deſtructive fires,
It deſolated ſunk. I ſee our plains
Unbounded waving with the gifts of harveſt;
Our ſeas with commerce throng'd, our buſy ports
With chearful toil. Our Enna blooms afreſh;
Afreſh the ſweets of thymy Hybla flow.
Our nymphs and ſhepherds, ſporting in each vale,
Inſpire new ſong, and wake the paſtoral reed—

The tongue of age is fond—Come, come, my ſons;
I long to ſee this prince, of whom the world
Speaks largely well—His father was my friend,
The brave unhappy Manfred—Come, my lords;
We tarry here too long.

SCENE V.

Two OFFICERS *keeping off the Crowd.*

One of the Crowd.

Shew us our king,
The valiant Manfred's ſon, who lov'd the people—
We muſt, we will behold him—Give us way.

FIRST OFFICER.

Pray, gentlemen, give back—it muſt not be—
Give back, I pray—on ſuch a glad occaſion
I would not ill entreat the loweſt of you.

SECOND MAN *of the Crowd.*

Nay, give us but a glimpſe of our young king.
We more than any baron of them all
Will pay him true allegiance.

SECOND OFFICER.

Friends—indeed—
You cannot paſs this way—We have ſtrict orders,
To keep for him himſelf, and for the barons,
All theſe apartments clear—Go to the gate
That fronts the ſea—You there will find admiſſion.

ALL.

Long live king Tancred! Manfred's ſon—Huzza!

[*Crowd goes off.*

FIRST OFFICER.

I do not marvel at their rage of joy:
He is a brave and amiable prince.
When in my lord Siffredi's houſe I liv'd,
Ere by his favour I obtain'd this office,
I there remember well the young count Tancred.
To ſee him and to love him were the ſame.
He was ſo noble in his ways, yet ſtill
So affable and mild—Well, well, old Sicily,
Yet happy days await thee!

SECOND OFFICER,

Grant it, Heaven!
We have ſeen ſad and troublous times enough.
He is, they ſay, to wed the late king's ſiſter,
Conſtantia.

FIRST OFFICER.

Friend, of that I greatly doubt.
Or I miſtake, or lord Siffredi's daughter,
The gentle Sigiſmunda has his heart.
If one may judge by kindly cordial looks,
And fond aſſiduous care to pleaſe each other,
Moſt certainly they love——O be they bleſt,
As they deſerve! It were great pity aught
Should part a matchleſs pair: the glory he,
And ſhe the blooming grace of Sicily!

SECOND OFFICER.

My lord Rodolpho comes.

SCENE VI.

RODOLPHO, *from the Senate.*

RODOLPHO.

My honeſt friends,
You may retire. [Officers *go out.*
A ſtorm is in the wind.
This Will perplexes all. No, Tancred never
Can ſtoop to theſe conditions, which at once
Attack his rights, his honour, and his love.
Thoſe wiſe old men, thoſe plodding grave ſtate pedants,
Forget the courſe of youth; their crooked prudence,
To baſeneſs verging ſtill, forgets to take
Into their fine-ſpun ſchemes the generous heart,
That thro' the cobweb ſyſtem burſting lays
Their labours waſte—So will this buſineſs prove,
Or I miſtake the king—back from the pomp
He ſeem'd at firſt to ſhrink; and round his brow
I mark'd a gathering cloud, when by his ſide,
As if deſign'd to ſhare the public homage,
He ſaw the tyrant's daughter. But confeſs'd,
At leaſt to me, the doubling tempeſt frown'd,
And ſhook his ſwelling boſom, when he heard
Th' unjuſt, the baſe conditions of the will.
Uncertain, toſt in cruel agitation,
He oft, methought, addreſs'd himſelf to ſpeak
And interrupt Siffredi; who appear'd,
With conſcious haſte, to dread that interruption,
And hurry'd on—But hark! I hear a noiſe,
As if th' aſſembly roſe—Ha! Sigiſmunda,

Oppreſs'd with grief and wrapt in penſive ſorrow,
Paſſes along——

[Sigiſmunda *and Attendants paſs thro' the back ſcene.* Laura *advances.*

SCENE VII.

RODOLPHO, LAURA.

LAURA.

Your high-prais'd friend, the king,
Is falſe, moſt vilely falſe! The meaneſt ſlave
Had ſhown a nobler heart; nor groſsly thus,
By the firſt bait ambition ſpread, been gull'd.
He Manfred's ſon! away! it cannot be!
The ſon of that brave prince could ne'er betray
Thoſe rights ſo long uſurp'd from his great fathers,
Which he, this day, by ſuch amazing fortune,
Had juſt regain'd; he ne'er could ſacrifice
All faith, all honour, gratitude, and love,
Even juſt reſentment of his father's fate,
And pride itſelf, whate'er exalts a man
Above the groveling ſons of peaſant-mud,
All in a moment—And for what? why truly,
For kind permiſſion, gracious leave, to ſit
On his own throne with tyrant William's daughter!

RODOLPHO.

I ſtand amaz'd—You ſurely wrong him, Laura.
There muſt be ſome miſtake.

LAURA.

There can be none!
Siffredi read his full and free conſent
Before th' applauding ſenate. True indeed,

A ſmall remain of ſhame, a timorous weakneſs,
Even daſtardly in falſehood, made him bluſh
To act this ſcene in Sigiſmunda's eye,
Who ſunk beneath his perfidy and baſeneſs.
Hence, till to-morrow he adjourn'd the ſenate—
To-morrow fix'd with infamy to crown him!
Then, leading off his gay triumphant princeſs,
He left the poor unhappy Sigiſmunda,
To bend her trembling ſteps to that ſad home
His faithleſs vows will render hateful to her—
He comes—Farewel—I cannot bear his preſence!

SCENE VIII.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, RODOLPHO.

TANCRED *entering to* SIFFREDI.

Avoid me, hoary traitor!—Go, Rodolpho,
Give orders that all paſſages this way
Be ſhut—Defend me from a hateful world,
The bane of peace and honour—then return—
What! doſt thou haunt me ſtill? O monſtrous inſult!
Unparallel'd indignity! Juſt Heaven!
Was ever king, was ever man ſo treated!
So trampled into baſeneſs!

SIFFREDI.

Here, my liege,
Here ſtrike! I nor deſerve, nor aſk for mercy.

TANCRED.

Diſtraction!—O my ſoul—Hold, reaſon, hold
Thy giddy ſeat—O this inhuman outrage
Unhinges thought!

SIFFREDI.

Exterminate thy ſervant!

TANCRED.

All, all but this I could have borne—but this!
This daring inſolence beyond example!
This murderous ſtroke that ſtabs my peace for ever!
That wounds me there—there! where the human heart
Moſt exquiſitely feels——

SIFFREDI.

O bear it not,
My royal lord! appeaſe on me your vengeance!

TANCRED.

Did ever tyrant image aught ſo cruel!
The loweſt ſlave that crawls upon the earth,
Robb'd of each comfort Heaven beſtows on mortals,
On the bare ground, has ſtill his virtue left,
The ſacred treaſures of an honeſt heart,
Which thou haſt dar'd, with raſh audacious hand,
And impious fraud, in me to violate——

SIFFREDI.

Behold, my liege, that raſh audacious hand,
Which not repents its crime——O glorious! happy!
If by my ruin I can ſave your honour.

TANCRED.

Such honour I renounce! with ſovereign ſcorn
Greatly deteſt it, and its mean adviſer!
Haſt thou not dar'd beneath my name to ſhelter—
My name for other purpoſes deſign'd,
Given from the fondneſs of a faithful heart,
With the beſt love o'erflowing—haſt thou not
Beneath thy ſovereign's name baſely preſum'd
To ſhield a lye? a lye! in public utter'd,

To all deluded Sicily? But know,
This poor contrivance is as weak as baſe.
In ſuch a wretched toil none can be held
But fools and cowards—Soon thy flimſy arts,
Touch'd by my juſt, my burning indignation,
Shall burſt like threads in flame!—Thy doating prudence
But more ſecures the purpoſe it would ſhake.
Had my reſolves been wavering and doubtful,
This would confirm them, make them fix'd as fate;
This adds the only motive that was wanting
To urge them on thro' war and deſolation—
What! marry her! Conſtantia! Her! the daughter
Of the fell tyrant who deſtroy'd my father!
The very thought is madneſs! Ere thou ſeeſt
The torch of Hymen light theſe hated nuptials,
Thou ſhalt behold Sicilia wrapt in flames,
Her cities raz'd, her valleys drench'd with ſlaughter—
Love ſet aſide—my pride aſſumes the quarrel.
My honour now is up; in ſpite of thee,
A world combin'd againſt me, I will give
This ſcatter'd Will in fragments to the winds,
Aſſert my rights, the freedom of my heart,
Cruſh all who dare oppoſe me to the duſt,
And heap perdition on thee!

SIFFREDI.

Sir, 'tis juſt.
Exhauſt on me your rage; I claim it all.
But for theſe public threats thy paſſion utters,
'Tis what thou canſt not do!

TANCRED.

I cannot! ha!
Driven to the dreadful brink of ſuch diſhonour
Enough to make the tameſt coward brave,

And into fierceneſs rouſe the mildeſt nature,
What ſhall arreſt my vengeance? who?

SIFFREDI.

Thyſelf!

TANCRED.

Away! dare not to juſtify thy crime!
That, that alone can aggravate its horror,
Add inſolence to inſolence—perhaps
May make my rage forget——

SIFFREDI.

O let it burſt
On this grey head devoted to thy ſervice!
But when the ſtorm has vented all its fury,
Thou then muſt hear—nay more, I know, thou wilt—
Wilt hear the calm, yet ſtronger voice of reaſon.
Thou muſt reflect that a whole people's ſafety,
The weal of truſted millions ſhould bear down,
Thyſelf the judge, thy fondeſt partial pleaſure.
Thou muſt reflect that there are other duties,
A nobler pride, a more exalted honour,
Superior pleaſures far, that will oblige,
Compel thee, to abide by this my deed,
Unwarranted perhaps in common juſtice,
But which Neceſſity, even Virtue's tyrant,
With awful voice commanded—Yes, thou muſt,
In calmer hours, diveſt thee of thy love,
Theſe common paſſions of the vulgar breaſt,
This boiling heat of youth, and be a king!
The lover of thy people!

TANCRED.

Truths ill-employ'd!
Abus'd to colour guilt!—a king! a king!
Yes, I will be a king, but not a ſlave!

In this will be a king! in this my people
Shall learn to judge how I will guard their rights,
When they behold me vindicate my own.
But have I, ſay, been treated like a king?—
Heavens! could I ſtoop to ſuch outrageous uſage,
I were a mean, a ſhameleſs wretch, unworthy
To wield a ſcepter in a land of ſlaves,
A ſoil abhorr'd of virtue ſhould belye
My father's blood, belye thoſe very maxims,
At other times, you taught my youth—Siffredi!
[*In a ſoften'd tone of voice.*

SIFFREDI.

Behold, my prince, behold thy poor old ſervant,
Whoſe darling care, theſe twenty years, has been
To nurſe thee up to virtue; who for thee,
Thy glory and thy weal, renounces all,
All intereſt or ambition can pour forth;
What many a ſelfiſh father would purſue
Thro' treachery and crimes: behold him here,
Bent on his feeble knees, to beg, conjure thee,
With tears to beg thee, to controul thy paſſion,
And ſave thyſelf, thy honour, and thy people!
Kneeling with me behold the many thouſands
To thy protection truſted: Fathers, mothers,
The ſacred front of venerable age,
The tender virgin and the helpleſs infant;
The miniſters of Heaven, thoſe, who maintain,
Around thy throne, the majeſty of rule;
And thoſe, whoſe labour, ſcorch'd by winds and ſun,
Feeds the rejoicing public: ſee them all,
Here at thy feet, conjuring thee to ſave them,
From miſery and war, from crimes and rapine!
Can there be aught, kind Heaven! in ſelf-indulgence
To weigh down theſe? This aggregate of love,

With which compar'd the deareſt private paſſion
Is but the waſted duſt upon the balance?
Turn not away—Oh is there not ſome part,
In thy great heart, ſo ſenſible to kindneſs,
And generous warmth, ſome nobler part, to feel
The prayers and tears of theſe, the mingled voice
Of Heaven and earth!

TANCRED.

There is! and thou haſt touch'd it.
Riſe, riſe, Siffredi—Oh! thou haſt undone me,
Unkind old man!—O ill-entreated Tancred!
Which way ſoe'er I turn, diſhonour rears
Her hideous front—and miſery and ruin!
Was it for this you took ſuch care to form me?
For this imbued me with the quickeſt ſenſe
Of ſhame; thoſe finer feelings, that ne'er vex
The common maſs of mortals, dully happy
In bleſt inſenſibility? O rather
You ſhould have ſear'd my heart; taught me that power
And ſplendid intereſt lord it ſtill o'er virtue;
That, gilded by proſperity and pride,
There is no ſhame, no meanneſs: temper'd thus,
I had been fit to rule a venal world.
Alas! what meant thy wantonneſs of prudence?
Why have you rais'd this miſerable conflict
Betwixt the duties of the king and man?
Set virtue againſt virtue?—Ah Siffredi!
'Tis thy ſuperfluous, thy unfeeling wiſdom,
That has involv'd me in a maze of error,
Almoſt beyond retreat—But hold, my ſoul,
Thy ſteady purpoſe—Toſt by various paſſions,
To this eternal anchor keep—There is,
Can be no public without private virtue——
Then mark me well, obſerve what I command;

It is the ſole expedient now remaining—
To-morrow, when the ſenate meets again,
Unfold the whole, unravel the deceit;
Nor that alone, try to repair its miſchief;
There all thy power, thy eloquence and intereſt
Exert, to reinſtate me in my rights,
And from thy own dark ſnares to diſembroil me—
Start not, my lord—This muſt and ſhall be done!
Or here, our friendſhip ends—Howe'er diſguis'd,
Whatever thy pretence, thou art a traitor.

SIFFREDI.

I ſhould indeed deſerve the name of traitor,
And even a traitor's fate, had I ſo ſlightly,
From principles ſo weak, done what I did,
As e'er to diſavow it——

TANCRED.

Ha!

SIFFREDI.

My liege,
Expect not this—Tho' practis'd long in courts,
I have not ſo far learn'd their ſubtle trade,
To veer obedient with each guſt of paſſion.
I honour thee, I venerate thy orders,
But honour more my duty. Nought on earth
Shall ever ſhake me from that ſolid rock,
Nor ſmiles nor frowns.——

TANCRED.

You will not then?

SIFFREDI.

I cannot!

TANCRED.

Away! begone!—O my Rodolpho, come,
And ſave me from this traitor!—Hence, I ſay.
Avoid my preſence ſtrait! and know, old man,
Thou my worſt foe beneath the maſk of friendſhip,
Who, not content to trample in the duſt
My deareſt rights, doſt with cool inſolence
Perſiſt, and call it duty; hadſt thou not
A daughter that protects thee, thou ſhouldſt feel
The vengeance thou deſerveſt—No reply!
Away!

SCENE IX.

TANCRED, RODOLPHO.

RODOLPHO.

What can incenſe my prince ſo highly
Againſt his friend Siffredi?

TANCRED.

Friend! Rodolpho?
When I have told thee what this friend has done,
How play'd me like a boy, a baſe-born wretch,
Who had nor heart nor ſpirit! thou wilt ſtand
Amaz'd, and wonder at my ſtupid patience.

RODOLPHO.

I heard, with mixt aſtoniſhment and grief,
The king's unjuſt diſhonourable will,
Void in itſelf—I ſaw you ſtung with rage,
And writhing in the ſnare; juſt as I went,
At your command, to wait you here—but that
Was the king's deed, not his.

TANCRED.

O he advis'd it!
Theſe many years he has in ſecret hatch'd
This black contrivance, glories in the ſcheme,
And proudly plumes him with his traiterous virtue.
But that was nought, Rodolpho, nothing, nothing!
O that was gentle, blameleſs to what follow'd!
I had, my friend, to Sigiſmunda given,
To huſh her fears, in the full guſh of fondneſs,
A blank ſign'd by my hand—and he, O Heavens!
Was ever ſuch a wild attempt!—he wrote
Beneath my name an abſolute compliance
To this deteſted Will; nay, dar'd to read it
Before myſelf, on my inſulted throne
His idle pageant plac'd—O words are weak
To paint the pangs, the rage, the indignation,
That whirl'd from thought to thought my ſoul in tempeſt,
Now on the point to burſt, and now by ſhame
Repreſs'd—But in the face of Sicily,
All mad with acclamation, what, Rodolpho,
What could I do? The ſole relief that roſe
To my diſtracted mind, was to adjourn
Th' aſſembly till to-morrow—But to-morrow
What can be done?—O it avails not what!
I care not what is done—My only care
Is how to clear my faith to Sigiſmunda.
She thinks me falſe! She caſt a look that kill'd me!
O I am baſe in Sigiſmunda's eye!
The loweſt of mankind, the moſt perfidious!

RODOLPHO.

This was a ſtrain of inſolence indeed,
A daring outrage of ſo ſtrange a nature,
As ſtuns me quite——

TANCRED.

Curs'd be my timid prudence!
That daſh'd not back, that moment in his face,
The bold preſumptuous lye—and curs'd this hand!
That from a ſtart of poor diſſimulation,
Led off my Sigiſmunda's hated rival.
Ah then! what, poiſon'd by the falſe appearance,
What, Sigiſmunda, were thy thoughts of me!
How, in the ſilent bitterneſs of ſoul,
How didſt thou ſcorn me! hate mankind, thyſelf,
For truſting to the vows of faithleſs Tancred!
For ſuch I ſeem'd—I was!—The thought diſtracts me!
I ſhould have caſt a flattering world aſide,
Ruſh'd from my throne, before them all avow'd her,
The choice, the glory of my free-born heart,
And ſpurn'd the ſhameful fetters thrown upon it—
Inſtead of that—confuſion!—what I did
Has clinch'd the chain, confirm'd Siffredi's crime,
And fix'd me down to infamy!

RODOLPHO.

My lord,
Blame not the conduct, which your ſituation
Tore from your tortur'd heart—What could you do?
Had you, ſo circumſtanc'd, in open ſenate,
Before th' aſtoniſh'd public, with no friends
Prepar'd, no party form'd, affronted thus
The haughty princeſs and her powerful faction,
Supported by this Will, the ſudden ſtroke,
Abrupt and premature, might have recoil'd
Upon yourſelf, even your own friends revolted,
And turn'd at once the public ſcale againſt you.
Beſides, conſider, had you then detected
In its freſh guilt this action of Siffredi,

You muſt with ſignal vengeance have chaſtis'd
The treaſonable deed—Nothing ſo mean
As weak inſulted power that dares not puniſh.
And how would that have ſuited with your love?
His daughter preſent too? Truſt me, your conduct,
Howe'er abhorrent to a heart like yours,
Was fortunate and wiſe—Not that I mean
E'er to adviſe ſubmiſſion——

TANCRED.

Heavens! Submiſſion!
Could I deſcend to bear it, even in thought,
Deſpiſe me, you, the world, and Sigiſmunda!
Submiſſion!—No!—To-morrow's glorious light
Shall flaſh diſcovery on the ſcene of baſeneſs.
Whatever be the riſque, by Heavens! to-morrow,
I will o'erturn the dirty lye-built ſchemes
Of theſe old men, and ſhew my faithful ſenate,
That Manfred's ſon knows to aſſert and wear,
With undiminiſh'd dignity, that crown
This unexpected day has plac'd upon him.
But this, my friend, theſe ſtormy guſts of pride,
Are foreign to my love—Till Sigiſmunda
Be diſabus'd, my breaſt is tumult all,
And can obey no ſettled courſe of reaſon.
I ſee her ſtill, I feel her powerful image,
That look, where with reproach complaint was mix'd,
Big with ſoft woe and gentle indignation,
Which ſeem'd at once to pity and to ſcorn me—
O let me find her! I too long have left
My Sigiſmunda to converſe with tears,
A prey to thoughts that picture me a villain.
But, ah! how, clogg'd with this accurſed ſtate,
A tedious world, ſhall I now find acceſs?

Her father too—Ten thouſand horrors crowd
Into the wild fantaſtic eye of love——
Who knows what he may do? Come then, my friend,
And by thy ſiſter's hand O let me ſteal
A letter to her boſom—I no longer
Can bear her abſence, by the juſt contempt
She now muſt brand me with, inflam'd to madneſs.
Fly, my Rodolpho, fly! engage thy ſiſter
To aid my letter, and this very evening
Secure an interview—I would not bear
This rack another day, not for my kingdom!
Till then, deep-plung'd in ſolitude and ſhades,
I will not ſee the hated face of man.

Thought drives on thought, on paſſions paſſions roll;
Her ſmiles alone can calm my raging ſoul.

ACT III. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA *alone, ſitting in a diſconſolate poſture.*

AH tyrant prince! ah more than faithleſs Tancred!
Ungenerous and inhuman in thy falſehood!
Hadſt thou, this morning, when my hopeleſs heart,
Submiſſive to my fortune and my duty,
Had ſo much ſpirit left, as to be willing
To give theeback thy vows, ah! hadſt thou then
Confeſs'd the ſad neceſſity thy ſtate
Impos'd upon thee, and with gentle friendſhip,
Since we muſt part at laſt, our parting ſoften'd;
I ſhould indeed—I ſhould have been unhappy,
But not to this extreme—Amidſt my grief,
I had, with penſive pleaſure, cheriſh'd ſtill
The ſweet remembrance of thy former love,
Thy image ſtill had dwelt upon my ſoul,
And made our guiltleſs woes not undelightful.
But coolly thus—How couldſt thou be ſo cruel?—
Thus to revive my hopes, to ſoothe my love
And call forth all its tenderneſs, then ſink me
In black deſpair—What unrelenting pride
Poſſeſs'd thy breaſt, that thou couldſt bear unmov'd
To ſee me bent beneath a weight of ſhame?
Pangs thou canſt never feel! how couldſt thou drag me
In barbarous triumph at a rival's car?
How make me witneſs to a ſight of horror?
That hand, which, but a few ſhort hours ago,
So wantonly abus'd my ſimple faith,
Before th' atteſting world given to another,
Irrevocably given!—There was a time,

When the leaſt cloud that hung upon my brow,
Perhaps imagin'd only, touch'd thy pity.
Then, brighten'd often by the ready tear,
Thy looks were ſoftneſs all; then the quick heart,
In every nerve alive, forgot itſelf,
And for each other then we felt alone.
But now, alas! thoſe tender days are fled;
Now thou canſt ſee me wretched, pierc'd with anguiſh,
With ſtudied anguiſh of thy own creating,
Nor wet thy harden'd eye—Hold, let me think—
I wrong thee ſure; thou canſt not be ſo baſe,
As meanly in my miſery to triumph——
What is it then?—Why ſhould I ſearch for pain?—
O, 'tis as bad!—'Tis fickleneſs of nature,
'Tis fickly love extinguiſh'd by ambition——
Is there, kind Heaven! no conſtancy in man?
No ſtedfaſt truth, no generous fix'd affection,
That can bear up againſt a ſelfiſh world?
No, there is none—Even Tancred is inconſtant!
[*Riſing.*
Hence! let me fly this ſcene!—Whate'er I ſee,
Theſe roofs, theſe walls, each object that ſurrounds me,
Are tainted with his vows—But whither fly?
The groves are worſe, the ſoft retreat of Belmont,
Its deepening glooms, gay lawns, and airy ſummits,
Will wound my buſy memory to torture,
And all its ſhades will whiſper—faithleſs Tancred!—
My father comes—How, ſunk in this diſorder,
Shall I ſuſtain his preſence?

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, SIGISMUNDA.

SIFFREDI.

Sigiſmunda,
My deareſt child! I grieve to find thee thus
A prey to tears. I know the powerful cauſe
From which they flow, and therefore can excuſe them,
But not their wilful obſtinate continuance.
Come, rouſe thee then, call up thy drooping ſpirit,
Come, wake to reaſon from this dream of love,
And ſhew the world thou art Siffredi's daughter.

SIGISMUNDA.

Alas! I am unworthy of that name.

SIFFREDI.

Thou art indeed to blame; thou haſt too raſhly
Engag'd thy heart, without a father's ſanction.
But this I can forgive. The king has virtues,
That plead thy full excuſe; nor was I void
Of blame, to truſt thee to thoſe dangerous virtues.
Then dread not my reproaches. Tho' he blames,
Thy tender father pities more than blames thee.
Thou art my daughter ſtill; and, if thy heart
Will now reſume its pride, aſſert itſelf,
And greatly riſe ſuperior to this trial,
I to my warmeſt confidence again
Will take thee, and eſteem thee more my daughter.

SIGISMUNDA.

O you are gentler far than I deſerve!
It is, it ever was, my darling pride,

To bend my ſoul to your ſupreme commands,
Your wiſeſt will; and tho' by love betray'd—
Alas! and puniſh'd too—I have tranſgreſs'd
The niceſt bounds of duty, yet I feel
A ſentiment of tenderneſs, a ſource
Of filial nature ſpringing in my breaſt,
That, ſhould it kill me, ſhall controul this paſſion,
And make me all ſubmiſſion and obedience
To you my honour'd lord, the beſt of fathers.

SIFFREDI.

Come to my arms, thou comfort of my age!
Thou only joy and hope of theſe grey hairs!
Come! let me take thee to a parent's heart;
There, with the kindly aid of my advice,
Even with the dew of theſe paternal tears,
Revive and nouriſh this becoming ſpirit ——
Then thou doſt promiſe me, my Sigiſmunda—
Thy father ſtoops to make it his requeſt—
Thou wilt reſign thy fond preſumptuous hopes,
And henceforth never more indulge one thought
That in the light of love regards the king?

SIGISMUNDA.

Hopes I have none!—Thoſe by this fatal day
Are blaſted all—But from my ſoul to baniſh,
While weeping memory there retains her ſeat,
Thoughts which the pureſt boſom might have cheriſh'd,
Once my delight, now even in anguiſh charming,
Is more, alas! my lord, than I can promiſe.

SIFFREDI.

Abſence and time, the ſoftener of our paſſions,
Will conquer this. Mean time, I hope from thee
A generous great effort; that thou wilt now
Exert thy utmoſt force, nor languiſh thus

Beneath the vain extravagance of love.
Let not thy father bluſh to hear it ſaid,
His daughter was ſo weak, e'er to admit
A thought ſo void of reaſon, that a king
Should to his rank, his honour, and his glory,
The high important duties of a throne,
Even to his throne itſelf, madly prefer
A wild romantic paſſion, the fond child
Of youthful dreaming thought and vacant hours;
That he ſhould quit his heaven-appointed ſtation,
Deſert his aweful charge, the care of all
The toiling millions which this iſle contains;
Nay more, ſhould plunge them into war and ruin:
And all to ſoothe a ſick imagination,
A miſerable weakneſs—Muſt for thee,
To make thee bleſt, Sicilia be unhappy?
The king himſelf, loſt to the nobler ſenſe
Of manly praiſe, become the piteous hero
Of ſome ſoft tale, and ruſh on ſure deſtruction?
Canſt thou, my daughter, let the monſtrous thought
Poſſeſs one moment thy perverted fancy?
Rouſe thee, for ſhame! and if a ſpark of virtue
Lies ſlumbering in thy ſoul, bid it blaze forth;
Nor ſink unequal to the glorious leſſon,
This day thy lover gave thee from his throne.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! that was not from virtue!—Had, my father,
That been his aim, I yield to what you ſay;
'Tis powerful truth, unanſwerable reaſon.
Then, then, with ſad but duteous reſignation,
I had ſubmitted as became your daughter;
But in that moment, when my humbled hopes
Were to my duty reconcil'd, to raiſe them

To yet a fonder height than e'er they knew,
Then rudely daſh them down—There is the ſting!
The blaſting view is ever preſent to me——
Why did you drag me to a ſight ſo cruel?

SIFFREDI.

It was a ſcene to fire thy emulation.

SIGISMUNDA.

It was a ſcene of perfidy!—But know,
I will do more than imitate the king—
For he is falſe!—I, tho' ſincerely pierc'd
With the beſt, trueſt paſſion, ever touch'd
A virgin's breaſt, here vow to Heaven and you,
Tho' from my heart I cannot, from my hopes
To caſt this prince—What would you more, my father?

SIFFREDI.

Yes, one thing more—thy father then is happy—
Tho' by the voice of innocence and virtue
Abſolv'd, we live not to ourſelves alone:
A rigorous world, with peremptory ſway,
Subjects us all, and even the nobleſt moſt.
This world from thee, my honour and thy own,
Demands one ſtep; a ſtep, by which convinc'd
The king may ſee thy heart diſdains to wear
A chain which his has greatly thrown aſide.
'Tis fitting too, thy ſex's pride commands thee,
To ſhew th' approving world thou canſt reſign,
As well as he, nor with inferior ſpirit,
A paſſion fatal to the public weal.
But above all, thou muſt root out for ever
From the king's breaſt the leaſt remain of hope,
And henceforth make his mention'd love diſhonour.
Theſe things, my daughter, that muſt needs be done,

Can but this way be done—by the ſafe refuge,
The ſacred ſhelter of a huſband's arms.
And there is one—

SIGISMUNDA.

Good Heavens! what means my lord?

SIFFREDI.

One of illuſtrious family, high rank,
Yet ſtill of higher dignity and merit,
Who can and will protect thee; one to awe
The king himſelf—Nay, hear me, Sigiſmunda—
The noble Oſmond courts thee for his bride,
And has my plighted word—This day—

SIGISMUNDA, *kneeling.*

My father!
Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees!
O if you ever wiſh to ſee me happy;
If e'er in infant years I gave you joy,
When, as I prattling twin'd around your neck,
You ſnatch'd me to your boſom, kiſs'd my eyes,
And melting ſaid you ſaw my mother there;
O ſave me from that worſt ſeverity
Of fate! O outrage not my breaking heart
To that degree!—I cannot!—'tis impoſſible!—
So ſoon withdraw it, give it to another—
Hear me, my deareſt father! hear the voice
Of nature and humanity, that plead
As well as juſtice for me!—Not to chuſe
Without your wiſe direction may be duty;
But ſtill my choice is free—That is a right,
Which even the loweſt ſlave can never loſe.
And would you thus degrade me? make me baſe?
For ſuch it were to give my worthleſs perſon
Without my heart, an injury to Oſmond,

The higheſt can be done—Let me, my lord—
Or I ſhall die, ſhall by the ſudden change
Be to diſtraction ſhock'd—Let me wear out
My hapleſs days in ſolitude and ſilence,
Far from the malice of a prying world!
At leaſt—you cannot ſure refuſe me this——
Give me a little time—I will do all,
All I can do, to pleaſe you!—O your eye
Sheds a kind beam——

SIFFREDI.

My daughter! you abuſe
The ſoftneſs of my nature—

SIGISMUNDA.

Here, my father,
Till you relent, here will I grow for ever!

SIFFREDI.

Riſe, Sigiſmunda.—Tho' you touch my heart,
Nothing can ſhake th' inexorable dictates
Of honour, duty, and determin'd reaſon.
Then by the holy ties of filial love,
Reſolve, I charge thee, to receive earl Oſmond,
As ſuits the man who is thy father's choice,
And worthy of thy hand—I go to bring him—

SIGISMUNDA.

Spare me, my deareſt father!

SIFFREDI, *aſide.*

I muſt ruſh
From her ſoft graſp, or nature will betray me!
O grant us, Heaven! that fortitude of mind,
Which liſtens to our duty, not our paſſions—
Quit me, my child!

SIGISMUNDA.

You cannot, O my father!
You cannot leave me thus!

SIFFREDI.

Come hither, Laura,
Come to thy friend. Now ſhew thyſelf a friend.
Combat her weakneſs; diſſipate her tears;
Cheriſh, and reconcile her to her duty.

SCENE III.

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA.

O woe on woe! diſtreſt by love and duty!
O every way unhappy Sigiſmunda!

LAURA.

Forgive me, Madam, if I blame your grief.
How can you waſte your tears on one ſo falſe?
Unworthy of your tenderneſs? to whom
Nought but contempt is due and indignation?

SIGISMUNDA.

You know not half the horrors of my fate!
I might perhaps have learn'd to ſcorn his falſehood;
Nay, when the firſt ſad burſt of tears was paſt,
I might have rous'd my pride and ſcorn'd himſelf—
But 'tis too much, this greateſt laſt misfortune—
O whither ſhall I fly? Where hide me, Laura,
From the dire ſcene my father now prepares?

LAURA.

What thus alarms you, Madam?

SIGISMUNDA.

Can it be?
Can I——ah no!——at once give to another
My violated heart? in one wild moment?
He brings earl Oſmond to receive my vows!
O dreadful change! for Tancred haughty Oſmond!

LAURA.

Now, on my ſoul, 'tis what an outrag'd heart
Like yours, ſhould wiſh!—I ſhould, by Heavens, eſteem it
Moſt exquiſite revenge!

SIGISMUNDA.

Revenge on whom?
On my own heart, already but too wretched!

LAURA.

On him! this Tancred! who has baſely ſold,
For the dull form of deſpicable grandeur,
His faith, his love!—At once a ſlave and tyrant!

SIGISMUNDA.

O rail at me, at my believing folly,
My vain ill-founded hopes, but ſpare him, Laura!

LAURA.

Who rais'd thoſe hopes? who triumphs o'er that weakneſs?
Pardon the word—You greatly merit him;
Better than him, with all his giddy pomp!
You rais'd him by your ſmiles when he was nothing!
Where is your woman's pride? that guardian ſpirit
Given us to daſh the perfidy of man?
Ye Powers! I cannot bear the thought with patience—
Yet recent from the moſt unſparing vows

The tongue of love e'er laviſh'd; from your hopes
So vainly, idly, cruelly deluded;
Before the public thus, before your father,
By an irrevocable ſolemn deed,
With ſuch inhuman ſcorn, to throw you from him!
To give his faithleſs hand yet warm from thine,
With complicated meanneſs, to Conſtantia!
And to complete his crime, when thy weak limbs
Could ſcarce ſupport thee, then, of thee regardleſs,
To lead her off!

SIGISMUNDA.

That was indeed a ſight
To poiſon love! to turn it into rage
And keen contempt!—What means this ſtupid weakneſs
That hangs upon me? Hence unworthy tears!
Diſgrace my cheek no more! No more, my heart,
For one ſo coolly falſe or meanly fickle——
O it imports not which—dare to ſuggeſt
The leaſt excuſe!—Yes, traitor, I will wring
Thy pride, will turn thy triumph to confuſion!
I will not pine away my days for thee,
Sighing to brooks and groves; while, with vain pity,
You in a rival's arms lament my fate——
No! let me periſh! ere I tamely be
That ſoft, that patient, gentle Sigiſmunda,
Who can conſole her with the wretched boaſt,
She was for thee unhappy!——If I am,
I will be nobly ſo!——Sicilia's daughters
Shall wondering ſee in me a great example
Of one who puniſh'd an ill-judging heart,
Who made it bow to what it moſt abhorr'd!
Cruſh'd it to miſery! for having thus
So lightly liſten'd to a worthleſs lover!

LAURA.

At laſt it mounts! the kindling pride of virtue!
Truſt me, thy marriage will embitter his——

SIGISMUNDA.

O may the furies light his nuptial torch!
Be it accurs'd as mine! for the fair peace,
The tender joys of hymeneal love,
May jealouſy awak'd, and fell remorſe,
Pour all their fierceſt venom thro' his breaſt!——
Where the Fates lead, and blind revenge, I follow!—
Let me not think—By injur'd love! I vow,
Thou ſhalt, baſe prince! perfidious and inhuman!
Thou ſhalt behold me in another's arms!
In his thou hateſt! Oſmond's!

LAURA.

That will grind
His heart with ſecret rage! Ay, that will ſting
His ſoul to madneſs! ſet him up a terror,
A ſpectacle of woe to faithleſs lovers!——
Your cooler thought, beſides, will of the change
Approve, and think it happy. Noble Oſmond
From the ſame ſtock with him derives his birth,
Firſt of Sicilian barons, prudent, brave,
Of ſtricteſt honour, and by all rever'd——

SIGISMUNDA.

Talk not of Oſmond, but perfidious Tancred!
Rail at him, rail! invent new names of ſcorn!
Aſſiſt me, Laura; lend my rage freſh fuel;
Support my ſtaggering purpoſe, which already
Begins to fail me—Ah, my vaunts how vain!
How have I ly'd to my own heart!—Alas!
My tears return, the mighty flood o'erwhelms me!

Ten thouſand crowding images diſtract
My tortur'd thought——And is it come to this?
Our hopes? our vows? our oft repeated wiſhes,
Breath'd from the fervent ſoul, and full of heaven,
To make each other happy?—come to this!

LAURA.

If thy own peace and honour cannot keep
Thy reſolution fix'd, yet, Sigiſmunda,
O think, how deeply, how beyond retreat,
Thy father is engag'd.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah wretched weakneſs!
That thus enthrals my ſoul, that chaſes thence
Each nobler thought, the ſenſe of every duty!—
And have I then no tears for thee, my father?
Can I forget thy cares, from helpleſs years,
Thy tenderneſs for me? an eye ſtill beam'd
With love? a brow that never knew a frown?
Nor a harſh word thy tongue? Shall I for theſe
Repay thy ſtooping venerable age,
With ſhame, diſquiet, anguiſh, and diſhonour?
It muſt not be!—Thou firſt of angels! come,
Sweet filial Piety! and firm my breaſt!
Yes, let one daughter to her fate ſubmit,
Be nobly wretched—but her father happy!——
Laura!—they come!—O Heavens! I cannot ſtand
The horrid trial!—Open, open earth!
And hide me from their view!

LAURA.

Madam!

SCENE IV.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIFFREDI.

My daughter,
Behold my noble friend who courts thy hand,
And whom to call my ſon I ſhall be proud;
Nor ſhall I leſs be pleas'd in his alliance,
To ſee thee happy.

OSMOND.

Think not, I preſume,
Madam, on this your father's kind conſent,
To make me bleſt. I love you from a heart,
That ſeeks your good ſuperior to my own;
And will, by every art of tender friendſhip,
Conſult your deareſt welfare. May I hope,
Yours does not diſavow your father's choice?

SIGISMUNDA.

I am a daughter, Sir—and have no power
O'er my own heart—I die—Support me, Laura.
[*Faints.*

SIFFREDI.

Help—Bear her off—She breathes—my daughter!—

SIGISMUNDA.

Oh!—
Forgive my weakneſs—ſoft—my Laura, lead me—
To my apartment.

SIFFREDI.

Pardon me, my lord,
If by this ſudden accident alarm'd,
I leave you for a moment.

SCENE V.

OSMOND *alone.*

Let me think——
What can this mean?——Is it to me averſion?
Or is it, as I fear'd, ſhe loves another?
Ha!—yes—perhaps the king, the young count Tancred!
They were bred up together——Surely that,
That cannot be—Has he not given his hand,
In the moſt ſolemn manner, to Conſtantia?
Does not his crown depend upon the deed?
No—if they lov'd, and this old ſtateſman knew it,
He could not to a king prefer a ſubject.
His virtues I eſteem—nay more, I truſt them——
So far as virtue goes—but could he place
His daughter on the throne of Sicily——
O 'tis a glorious bribe, too much for man!——
What is it then?—I care not what it be.
My honour now, my dignity demands,
That my propos'd alliance, by her father,
And even herſelf accepted, be not ſcorn'd.
I love her too—I never knew till now
To what a pitch I lov'd her. O ſhe ſhot
Ten thouſand charms into my inmoſt ſoul!
She look'd ſo mild, ſo amiably gentle,
She bow'd her head, ſhe glow'd with ſuch confuſion,
Such lovelineſs of modeſty! She is,

In gracious mind, in manners, and in perſon,
The perfect model of all female beauty!—
She muſt be mine—She is!—If yet her heart
Conſents not to my happineſs, her duty,
Join'd to my tender cares, will gain ſo much
Upon her generous nature—That will follow.

The man of ſenſe, who acts a prudent part,
Not flattering ſteals, but forms himſelf the heart.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

The garden belonging to SIFFREDI's *houſe.*

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA, *with a letter in her hand.*

'TIS done!—I am a ſlave!—The fatal vow
Has paſs'd my lips!—Methought in thoſe ſad moments,
The tombs around, the ſaints, the darken'd altar,
And all the trembling ſhrines with horror ſhook.
But here is ſtill new matter of diſtreſs.
O Tancred ceaſe to perſecute me more!
O grudge me not ſome calmer ſtate of woe!
Some quiet gloom to ſhade my hopeleſs days,
Where I may never hear of love and thee!——
Has Laura too conſpir'd againſt my peace?
Why did you take this letter?—bear it back—
[*Giving her the letter.*
I will not court new pain.

LAURA,

Madam, Rodolpho
Urg'd me ſo much, nay, even with tears conjur'd me,
But this once more to ſerve th' unhappy king—
For ſuch he ſaid he was—that tho' enrag'd,
Equal with thee, at his inhuman falſehood,
I could not to my brother's fervent prayers
Refuſe this office—Read it—His excuſes
Will only more expoſe his falſehood.

SIGISMUNDA.

No.

It ſuits not Oſmond's wife to read one line
From that contagious hand—ſhe knows too well!

LAURA.

He paints him out diſtreſs'd beyond expreſſion,
Even on the point of madneſs. Wild as winds,
And fighting ſeas, he raves. His paſſions mix,
With ceaſeleſs rage, all in each giddy moment.
He dies to ſee you and to clear his faith.

SIGISMUNDA.

Save me from that!—That would be worſe than all!

LAURA.

I but report my brother's words; who then
Began to talk of ſome dark impoſition,
That had deceiv'd us all: when, interrupted,
We heard your father and earl Oſmond near,
As ſummon'd to Conſtantia's court they went.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ha! impoſition?—Well! If I am doom'd
To be, o'er all my ſex, the wretch of love,
In vain I would reſiſt—Give me the letter—
To know the worſt is ſome relief——Alas!
It was not thus, with ſuch dire palpitations,
That, Tancred, once I us'd to read thy letters.

[*Attempting to read the letter, but gives it to* Laura.

Ah fond remembrance blinds me!—Read it, Laura.

LAURA *reads.*

" Deliver me, Sigiſmunda, from that moſt exquiſite
" miſery which a faithful heart can ſuffer—To be
" thought baſe by her, from whoſe eſteem even virtue

" borrows new charms. When I ſubmitted to my
" cruel ſituation, it was not falſehood you beheld, but
" an exceſs of love. Rather than endanger that, I
" for a while gave up my honour. Every moment
" till I ſee you ſtabs me with ſeverer pangs than real
" guilt itſelf can feel. Let me then conjure you to
" meet me in the garden, towards the cloſe of the
" day, when I will explain this myſtery. We have
" been moſt inhumanly abuſed; and that by the
" means of the very paper which I gave you, from
" the warmeſt ſincerity of love, to aſſure to you the
" heart and hand of

" TANCRED."

SIGISMUNDA.

There, Laura, there, the dreadful ſecret ſprung!
That paper! ah that paper! it ſuggeſts
A thouſand horrid thoughts—I to my father
Gave it; and he perhaps—I dare not caſt
A look that way—If yet indeed you love me,
O blaſt me not, kind Tancred, with the truth!
O pitying keep me ignorant for ever!
What ſtrange peculiar miſery is mine?
Reduc'd to wiſh the man I love were falſe?
Why was I hurry'd to a ſtep ſo raſh?
Repairleſs woe!—I might have waited, ſure,
A few ſhort hours—No duty that forbade—
I ow'd thy love that juſtice; till this day
Thy love an image of all-perfect goodneſs!
A beam from Heaven that glow'd with every virtue!
And have I thrown this prize of life away?
The piteous wreck of one diſtracted moment?
Ah the cold prudence of remorſeleſs age!
Ah parents, traitors to your children's bliſs!

Ah curs'd, ah blind revenge!—On every hand
I was betray'd—You, Laura, too, betray'd me!

LAURA.

Who, who, but he, whate'er he writes, betray'd you?
Or falſe or puſillanimous. For once,
I will with you ſuppoſe, that his agreement
To the king's will was forg'd—Tho' forg'd by whom?
Your father ſcorns the crime—Yet what avails it?
This, if it clears his truth, condemns his ſpirit.
A youthful king, by love and honour fir'd,
Patient to ſit on his inſulted throne,
And let an outrage, of ſo high a nature,
Unpuniſh'd paſs, uncheck'd, uncontradicted—
O 'tis a meanneſs equal even to falſehood.

SIGISMUNDA.

Laura, no more—We have already judg'd
Too largely without knowledge. Oft, what ſeems
A trifle, a mere nothing, by itſelf,
In ſome nice ſituations turns the ſcale
Of Fate, and rules the moſt important actions.
Yes, I begin to feel a ſad preſage:
I am undone, from that eternal ſource
Of human woes—the judgment of the paſſions.
But what have I to do with theſe excuſes?
O ceaſe my treacherous heart to give them room!
It ſuits not thee to plead a lover's cauſe;
Even to lament my fate is now diſhonour.
Nought now remains, but with relentleſs purpoſe,
To ſhun all interviews, all clearing up
Of this dark ſcene; to wrap myſelf in gloom,
In ſolitude and ſhades; there to devour
The ſilent ſorrows ever ſwelling here;
And ſince I muſt be wretched—for I muſt——

To claim the mighty miſery myſelf,
Engroſs it all, and ſpare a hapleſs father.
Hence, let me fly!—the hour approaches——

LAURA.

Madam,
Behold he comes—the king—

SIGISMUNDA.

Heavens! how eſcape?
No—I will ſtay—This one laſt meeting—Leave me.

SCENE II.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

And are theſe long long hours of torture paſt?
My life! my Sigiſmunda!
[*Throwing himſelf at her feet.*

SIGISMUNDA.

Riſe, my lord.
To ſee my ſovereign thus no more becomes me.

TANCRED.

O let me kiſs the ground on which you tread!
Let me exhale my ſoul in ſofteſt tranſport!
Since I again embrace my Sigiſmunda! [*Riſing.*
Unkind! how couldſt thou ever deem me falſe?
How thus diſhonour love?—O I could much
Embitter my complaint!—How low were then
Thy thoughts of me? How didſt thou then affront
The human heart itſelf? After the vows,
The fervent truth, the tender proteſtations,

Which mine has often pour'd, to let thy breaſt,
Whate'er th' appearance was, admit ſuſpicion?

SIGISMUNDA.

How! when I heard myſelf your full conſent
To the late king's ſo juſt and prudent will?
Heard it before you read, in ſolemn ſenate?
When I beheld you give your royal hand
To her, whoſe birth and dignity of right
Demands that high alliance? Yes, my lord,
You have done well. The man, whom Heaven appoints
To govern others, ſhould himſelf firſt learn
To bend his paſſions to the ſway of reaſon.
In all you have done well; but when you bid
My humbled hopes look up to you again,
And ſooth'd with wanton cruelty my weakneſs—
That too was well—My vanity deſerv'd
The ſharp rebuke, whoſe fond extravagance
Could ever dream to balance your repoſe,
Your glory and the welfare of a people.

TANCRED.

Chide on, chide on. Thy ſoft reproaches now
Inſtead of wounding, only ſoothe my fondneſs.
No, no, thou charming conſort of my ſoul!
I never lov'd thee with ſuch faithful ardour,
As in that cruel miſerable moment
You thought me falſe; when even my honour ſtoop'd
To wear for thee a baffled face of baſeneſs.
It was thy barbarous father, Sigiſmunda,
Who caught me in the toil. He turn'd that paper,
Meant for th' aſſuring bond of nuptial love,
To ruin it for ever; he, he wrote
That forg'd conſent, you heard, beneath my name,

Nay dar'd before my out-rag'd throne to read it!
Had he not been thy father—Ha! my love!
You tremble, you grow pale.

SIGISMUNDA.

Oh leave me, Tancred!

TANCRED.

No!—Leave thee?—Never! never! till you ſet
My heart at peace, till theſe dear lips again
Pronounce thee mine! Without thee I renounce
Myſelf, my friends, the world—Here on this hand—

SIGISMUNDA.

My lord, forget that hand, which never now
Can be to thine united——

TANCRED.

Sigiſmunda!
What doſt thou mean?—Thy words, thy look, thy manner,
Seem to conceal ſome horrid ſecret—Heavens!——
No—That was wild—Diſtraction fires the thought!—

SIGISMUNDA.

Enquire no more——I never can be thine.

TANCRED.

What, who ſhall interpoſe? who dares attempt
To brave the fury of an injur'd king?
Who, ere he ſees thee raviſh'd from his hopes,
Will wrap all blazing Sicily in flames—

SIGISMUNDA.

In vain your power, my lord—This fatal error,
Join'd to my father's unrelenting will,
Has plac'd an everlaſting bar betwixt us——
I am—earl Oſmond's—Wife.

TANCRED.

Earl Oſmond's wife!——

[*After a long pauſe, during which they look at one another with the higheſt agitation and moſt tender diſtreſs.*

Heavens! did I hear thee right! what! marry'd? marry'd!
Loſt to thy faithful Tancred! loſt for ever!
Couldſt thou then doom me to ſuch matchleſs woe,
Without ſo much as hearing me?—Diſtraction!—
Alas! what haſt thou done? Ah Sigiſmunda!—
Thy raſh credulity has done a deed,
Which of two happieſt lovers—that e'er felt
The bliſsful power, has made two finiſh'd wretches!
But—Madneſs!—Sure, thou know'ſt it cannot be!
This hand is mine! a thouſand thouſand vows——

SCENE III.

TANCRED, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND.

[*Snatching her hand from the king.*

Madam, this hand, by the moſt ſolemn rites,
A little hour ago, was given to me,
And did not ſovereign honour now command me,
Never but with my life to quit my claim,
I would renounce it——thus!

TANCRED.

Ha! who art thou?
Preſumptuous man!

SIGISMUNDA, *aſide.*

Where is my father? Heavens!
[*Goes out.*

OSMOND.

One thou ſhouldſt better know—Yes—view me—one!
Who can and will maintain his rights and honour,
Againſt a faithleſs prince, an upſtart king,
Whoſe firſt baſe deed is what a harden'd tyrant
Would bluſh to act.

TANCRED.

Inſolent Oſmond! know,
This upſtart king will hurl confuſion on thee,
And all who ſhall invade his ſacred rights,
Prior to thine—Thine founded on compulſion,
On infamous deceit, while his proceed
From mutual love and free long-plighted faith.
She is, and ſhall be mine!—I will annul,
By the high power with which the laws inveſt me,
Thoſe guilty forms in which you have entrap'd,
Baſely entrap'd, to thy deteſted nuptials,
My queen betroth'd; who has my heart, my hand,
And ſhall partake my throne—If, haughty lord,
If this thou didſt not know, then know it now!
And know beſides, as I have told thee this,
Shouldſt thou but think to urge thy treaſon further—
Than treaſon more! Treaſon againſt my love!——
Thy life ſhall anſwer for it!

OSMOND.

Ha! my life!——
It moves my ſcorn to hear thy empty threats.
When was it that a Norman baron's life
Became ſo vile, as on the frown of kings

To hang?—Of that, my lord, the law muſt judge:
Or if the law be weak, my guardian ſword—

TANCRED.

Dare not to touch it, traitor! leſt my rage
Break looſe, and do a deed that miſbecomes me.

SCENE IV.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, OSMOND.

SIFFREDI *entering.*

My gracious lord! what is it, I behold!
My ſovereign in contention with his ſubjects?
Surely this houſe deſerves from royal Tancred
A little more regard, than to be made
A ſcene of trouble and unſeemly jars.
It grieves my ſoul, it baffles every hope,
It makes me ſick of life, to ſee thy glory
Thus blaſted in the bud—Heavens! can your highneſs
From your exalted character deſcend,
The dignity of virtue; and, inſtead
Of being the protector of our rights,
The holy guardian of domeſtic bliſs,
Unkindly thus diſturb the ſweet repoſe,
The ſecret peace of families, for which
Alone the freeborn race of man to laws
And government ſubmitted?

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi,
Spare thy rebuke. The duties of my ſtation
Are not to me unknown.—But thou, old man,
Doſt thou not bluſh to talk of rights invaded?

And of our beſt our deareſt bliſs diſturb'd?
Thou! who with more than barbarous perfidy
Haſt trampled all allegiance, juſtice, truth,
Humanity itſelf, beneath thy feet?
Thou know'ſt thou haſt—I could, to thy confuſion,
Return thy hard reproaches; but I ſpare thee
Before this lord, for whoſe ill-ſorted friendſhip
Thou haſt moſt baſely ſacrific'd thy daughter.
Farewel, my lord!—For thee, lord conſtable,
Who doſt preſume to lift thy ſurly eye
To my ſoft love, my gentle Sigiſmunda,
I once again command thee, on thy life———
Yes—chew thy rage—but mark me—on thy life,
No further urge thy arrogant pretenſions!

SCENE V.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND.

OSMOND.

Ha! arrogant pretenſions! heaven and earth!
What! arrogant pretenſions to my wife!
My wedded wife! Where are we? In a land
Of civil rule, of liberty and laws?——
Not on my life purſue them?—Giddy prince!
My life diſdains thy nod. It is the gift
Of parent Heaven, who gave me too an arm,
A ſpirit to defend it againſt tyrants.
The Norman race, the ſons of mighty Rollo,
Who ruſhing in a tempeſt from the north,
Great nurſe of generous freemen! bravely won
With their own ſwords their ſeats, and ſtill poſſeſs them
By the ſame noble tenure, are not us'd

To hear ſuch language—If I now deſiſt,
Then brand me for a coward! deem me villain!
A traitor to the public! By this conduct
Deceiv'd, betray'd, inſulted, tyranniz'd.
Mine is a common cauſe. My arm ſhall guard,
Mix'd with my own, the rights of each Sicilian,
Of ſocial life, and of mankind in general.
Ere to thy tyrant rage they fall a prey,
I ſhall find means to ſhake thy tottering throne,
Which this illegal, this perfidious uſage
Forfeits at once, and cruſh thee in the ruins!
Conſtantia is my queen!

SIFFREDI.

Lord conſtable,
Let us be ſtedfaſt in the right; but let us
Act with cool prudence, and with manly temper,
As well as manly firmneſs. True, I own,
Th' indignities you ſuffer are ſo high,
As might even juſtify what now you threaten.
But if, my lord, we can prevent the woes,
The cruel horrors of inteſtine war,
Yet hold untouch'd our liberties and laws;
O let us, rais'd above the turbid ſphere
Of little ſelfiſh paſſions, nobly do it!
Nor to our hot intemperate pride pour out
A dire libation of Sicilian blood.
'Tis godlike magnanimity, to keep,
When moſt provok'd, our reaſon calm and clear,
And execute her will, from a ſtrong ſenſe
Of what is right, without the vulgar aid
Of heat and paſſion, which, tho' honeſt, bear us
Often too far. Remember that my houſe
Protects my daughter ſtill; and ere I ſaw her
Thus raviſh'd from us, by the arm of power,

This hand ſhould act the Roman father's part.
Fear not; be temperate; all will yet be well.
I know the king. At firſt his paſſions burſt
Quick as the lightning's flaſh; but in his breaſt
Honour and juſtice dwell—Truſt me, to reaſon
He will return.

OSMOND.

He will!—By Heavens, he ſhall!—
You know the king—I wiſh, my lord Siffredi,
That you had deign'd to tell me all you knew—
And would you have me wait, with duteous patience,
Till he return to reaſon? Ye juſt Powers!
When he has planted on our necks his foot,
And trod us into ſlaves; when his vain pride
Is cloy'd with our ſubmiſſion; if, at laſt,
He finds his arm too weak to ſhake the frame
Of wide-eſtabliſh'd order out of joint,
And overturn all juſtice; then, perchance,
He, in a fit of fickly kind repentance,
May make a merit to return to reaſon.
No, no, my lord!—There is a nobler way,
To teach the blind oppreſſive *Fury* reaſon:
Oft has the luſtre of avenging ſteel
Unſeal'd her ſtupid eyes—The ſword is reaſon!

SCENE VI.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, RODOLPHO, *with Guards.*

RODOLPHO.

My lord high conſtable of Sicily,
In the king's name, and by his ſpecial order,
I here arreſt you priſoner of ſtate.

OSMOND.

What king? I know no king of Sicily—
Unleſs he be the huſband of Conſtantia.

RODOLPHO.

Then know him now——Behold his royal orders
To bear you to the caſtle of Palermo.

SIFFREDI.

Let the big torrent foam its madneſs off.
Submit, my lord—No caſtle long can hold
Our wrongs—This, more than friendſhip or alliance,
Confirms me thine; this binds me to thy fortunes,
By the ſtrong tye of common injury,
Which nothing can diſſolve——I grieve, Rodolpho,
To ſee the reign in ſuch unhappy ſort
Begin.

OSMOND.

The reign! the uſurpation call it!
This meteor king may blaze awhile, but ſoon
Muſt ſpend his idle terrors—Sir, lead on——
Farewel, my lord——More than my life and fortune,
Remember well, is in your hands——my honour!

SIFFREDI.

Our honour is the ſame. My ſon farewel——
We ſhall not long be parted. On theſe eyes
Sleep ſhall not ſhed his balm, till I behold thee
Reſtor'd to freedom, or partake thy bonds.

Even noble courage is not void of blame,
Till nobler patience ſanctifies its flame.

ACT V. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI, *alone.*

THE proſpect lowrs around. I found the king,
Tho' calm'd a little, with ſubſiding tempeſt,
As ſuits his generous nature, yet in love
Abated nought, moſt ardent in his purpoſe;
Inexorably fix'd, whate'er the riſque,
To claim my daughter, and diſſolve this marriage—
I have embark'd, upon a perilous ſea,
A mighty treaſure. Here the rapid youth,
Th' impetuous paſſions of a lover-king
Check my bold courſe; and there, the jealous pride,
Th' impatient honour of a haughty lord
Of the firſt rank, in intereſt and dependants
Near equal to the king, forbid retreat.
My honour too, the ſame unchang'd conviction,
That theſe my meaſures were, and ſtill remain
Of abſolute neceſſity, to ſave
The land from civil fury, urge me on.
But how proceed?—I only faſter ruſh
Upon the deſperate evils I would ſhun.
Whate'er the motive be, deceit, I fear,
And harſh unnatural force are not the means
Of public welfare or of private bliſs—
Bear witneſs, Heaven! Thou mind-inſpecting eye!
My breaſt is pure. I have prefer'd my duty,
The good and ſafety of my fellow-ſubjects,
To all thoſe views that fire the ſelfiſh race
Of men, and mix them in eternal broils.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to* SIFFREDI.

OFFICER.

My lord, a man of noble port, his face
Wrapp'd in diſguiſe, is earneſt for admiſſion.

SIFFREDI.

Go, bid him enter— [Officer *goes out.*
Ha! wrap'd in diſguiſe!
And at this late unſeaſonable hour!
When o'er the world tremendous midnight reigns,
By the dire gloom of raging tempeſt doubled—

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, *diſcovering himſelf.*

SIFFREDI.

What! ha! earl Oſmond, you?—Welcome, once more,
To this glad roof!—But why in this diſguiſe?
Would I could hope the king exceeds his promiſe!
I have his faith ſoon as to-morrow's ſun
Shall gild Sicilia's cliffs, you ſhall be free.——
Has ſome good angel turn'd his heart to juſtice?

OSMOND.

It is not by the favour of count Tancred
That I am here, As much I ſcorn his favour,
As I defy his tyranny and threats——
Our friend Goffredo, who commands the caſtle,
On my parole, ere dawn, to render back
My perſon, has permitted me this freedom.
Know then; the faithleſs outrage of to-day,
By him committed whom you call the king,

Has rous'd Conſtantia's court. Our friends, the friends
Of virtue, juſtice, and of public faith,
Ripe for revolt, are in high ferment all.
This, this, they ſay, exceeds whate'er deform'd
The miſerable days we ſaw beneath
William the Bad. This ſaps the ſolid baſe,
At once, of government and private life;
This ſhameleſs impoſition on the faith,
The majeſty of ſenates, this lewd inſult,
This violation of the rights of men.
Added to theſe, his ignominious treatment
Of her th' illuſtrious offspring of our kings,
Sicilia's hope, and now our royal miſtreſs.
You know, my lord, how groſsly theſe infringe
The late king's will; which orders, if count Tancred
Make not Conſtantia partner of his throne,
That he be quite excluded the ſucceſſion,
And ſhe to Henry given, king of the Romans,
The potent emperor Barbaroſſa's ſon,
Who ſeeks with earneſt inſtance her alliance.
I thence of you, as guardian of the laws,
As guardian of this Will to you entruſted,
Deſire, nay more, demand your inſtant aid,
To ſee it put in vigorous execution.

SIFFREDI.

You cannot doubt, my lord, of my concurrence.
Who more than I have labour'd this great point?
'Tis my own plan. And, if I drop it now,
I ſhould be juſtly branded with the ſhame
Of raſh advice, or deſpicable weakneſs.
But let us not precipitate the matter.
Conſtantia's friends are numerous and ſtrong;
Yet Tancred's, truſt me, are of equal force.

E'er ſince the ſecret of his birth was known,
The people all are in a tumult hurl'd
Of boundleſs joy, to hear there lives a prince
Of mighty Guiſcard's line. Numbers, beſides,
Of powerful barons, who at heart had pin'd,
To ſee the reign of their renown'd forefathers,
Won by immortal deeds of matchleſs valour,
Paſs from the gallant Normans to the Suevi,
Will with a kind of rage eſpouſe his cauſe—
'Tis ſo, my lord—be not by paſſion blinded——
'Tis ſurely ſo—O if our prating virtue
Dwells not in words alone—O let us join,
My generous Oſmond, to avert theſe woes,
And yet ſuſtain our tott'ring Norman kingdom!

OSMOND.

But how, Siffredi? how?—If by ſoft means
We can maintain our rights, and ſave our country,
May his unnatural blood firſt ſtain the ſword,
Who with unpitying fury firſt ſhall draw it!

SIFFREDI.

I have a thought—The glorious work be thine.
But it requires an awful flight of virtue,
Above the paſſions of the vulgar breaſt,
And thence from thee I hope it, noble Oſmond—
Suppoſe my daughter, to her God devoted,
Were plac'd within ſome convent's ſacred verge,
Beneath the dread protection of the altar—

OSMOND.

Ere then, by Heavens! I would devoutly ſhave
My holy ſcalp, turn whining monk myſelf,
And pray inceſſant for the tyrant's ſafety!—
What! How! becauſe an inſolent invader,

A ſacrilegious tyrant, in contempt
Of all thoſe nobleſt rights, which to maintain
Is man's peculiar pride, demands my wife;
That I ſhall thus betray the common cauſe
Of human kind, and tamely yield her up,
Even in the manner you propoſe—O then
I were ſupremely vile! degraded! ſham'd!
The ſcorn of manhood! and abhorr'd of honour!

SIFFREDI.

There is, my lord, an honour, the calm child
Of reaſon, of humanity and mercy,
Superior far to this punctilious demon,
That ſingly minds itſelf, and oft embroils
With proud barbarian niceties the world!

OSMOND.

My lord, my lord!—I cannot brook your prudence—
It holds a pulſe unequal to my blood——
Unblemiſh'd honour is the flower of virtue!
The vivifying ſoul! and he who ſlights it
Will leave the other dull and lifeleſs droſs.

SIFFREDI.

No more——You are too warm.

OSMOND.

You are too cool.

SIFFREDI.

Too cool, my lord? I were indeed too cool,
Not to reſent this language, and to tell thee——
I wiſh earl Oſmond were as cool as I
To his own ſelfiſh bliſs—ay, and as warm
To that of others—But of this no more——
My daughter is thy wife—I gave her to thee,

And will againſt all force maintain her thine.
But think not I will catch thy headlong paſſions,
Whirl'd in a blaze of madneſs o'er the land;
Or till the laſt extremity compel me,
Riſque the dire means of war—The king to-morrow
Will ſet you free; and, if by gentle means
He does not yield my daughter to your arms,
And wed Conſtantia, as the will requires,
Why then expect me on the ſide of juſtice——
Let that ſuffice.

OSMOND.

It does—Forgive my heat.
My rankled mind, by injuries inflam'd,
May be too prompt to take and give offence.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis paſt—Your wrongs, I own, may well tranſport
The wiſeſt mind—But henceforth, noble Oſmond,
Do me more juſtice, honour more my truth,
Nor mark me with an eye of ſquint ſuſpicion——
Theſe jars apart—You may repoſe your ſoul
On my firm faith and unremitting friendſhip.
Of that I ſure have given exalted proof,
And the next ſun we ſee, ſhall prove it further——
Return, my ſon, and from your friend Goffredo
Releaſe your word. There try, by ſoft repoſe,
To calm your breaſt.

OSMOND.

Bid the vext ocean ſleep,
Swept by the pinions of the raging north——
But your frail age, by care and toil exhauſted,
Demands the balm of all-repairing reſt.

SIFFREDI.

Soon as to-morrow's dawn ſhall ſtreak the ſkies,
I, with my friends in ſolemn ſtate aſſembled,
Will to the palace, and demand your freedom,
Then by calm reaſon, or by higher means,
The king ſhall quit his claim, and in the face
Of Sicily, my daughter ſhall be yours.
Farewel.

OSMOND.

My lord, good night.

SCENE III.

OSMOND *alone.* [*After a long pauſe.*

I like him not——
Yes—I have mighty matter of ſuſpicion.
'Tis plain—I ſee it lurking in his breaſt,
He has a fooliſh fondneſs for this king—
My honour is not ſafe, while here my wife
Remains—Who knows but he this very night
May bear her to ſome convent as he mention'd—
The king too—tho' I ſmother'd up my rage,
I mark'd it well—will ſet me free to-morrow.
Why not to-night? He has ſome dark deſign—
By Heavens! he has—I am abus'd moſt groſsly;
Made the vile tool of this old ſtateſman's ſchemes;
Marry'd to one—Ay, and he knew it,—one
Who loves young Tancred! Hence her ſwooning, tears,
And all her ſoft diſtreſs, when ſhe diſgrac'd me
By baſely giving her perfidious hand
Without her heart—Hell and perdition! this,
This is the perfidy!—This is the fell,

The keen, envenom'd, exquiſite diſgrace!
Which to a man of honour even exceeds
The falſehood of the perſon—But I now
Will rouſe me from the poor tame lethargy,
By my believing fondneſs caſt upon me.
I will not wait his crawling timid motions,
Perhaps to blind me meant, which he to-morrow
Has promis'd to purſue. No! ere his eyes
Shall open on to-morrow's orient beam,
I will convince him that earl Oſmond never
Was form'd to be his dupe—I know full well
Th' important weight and danger of the deed:
But to a man, whom greater dangers preſs,
Driven to the brink of infamy and horror,
Raſhneſs itſelf, and utter deſperation,
Are the beſt prudence—I will bear her off
This night, and lodge her in a place of ſafety.
I have a truſty band that waits not far.
Hence! let me loſe no time—One rapid moment
Should ardent form, at once, and execute
A bold deſign—'Tis fix'd—'Tis done!—Yes, then,
When I have ſeiz'd the prize of love and honour,
And with a friend ſecur'd her; to the caſtle
I will repair, and claim Goffredo's promiſe
To riſe with all his garriſon—my friends
With brave impatience wait. The mine is laid,
And only wants my kindling touch to ſpring.

SCENE IV.

SIGISMUNDA's *Apartment.*

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

LAURA.

Heavens! 'tis a fearful night!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! the black rage
Of midnight tempeſt, or th' aſſuring ſmiles
Of radiant morn are equal all to me.
Nought now has charms or terrors to my breaſt,
The ſeat of ſtupid woe!—Leave me, my Laura.
Kind reſt, perhaps, may huſh my woes a little—
Oh for that quiet ſleep that knows no morning!

LAURA.

Madam, indeed I know not how to go.
Indulge my fondneſs—Let me watch a while
By your ſad bed, till theſe dread hours ſhall paſs.

SIGISMUNDA.

Alas! what is the toil of elements,
This idle perturbation of the ſky,
To what I feel within!—Oh that the fires
Of pitying Heaven would point their fury here!
Good night, my deareſt Laura!

LAURA.

O I know not
What this oppreſſion means—But 'tis with pain,
With tears, I can perſuade myſelf to leave you—
Well then—Good night, my deareſt Sigiſmunda!

SCENE V.

SIGISMUNDA.

And am I then alone?—The moſt undone,
Moſt wretched being now beneath the cope
Of this affrighting gloom that wraps the world!——
I ſaid I did not fear—Ah me! I feel
A ſhivering horror run thro' all my powers!
O I am nought but tumult, fears and weakneſs!
And yet how idle fear when hope is gone,
Gone, gone for ever!—O thou gentle ſcene
[*Looking towards her bed.*
Of ſweet repoſe, where by the oblivious draught
Of each ſad toilſome day, to peace reſtor'd
Unhappy mortals loſe their woes awhile,
Thou haſt no peace for me!—What ſhall I do?
How paſs this dreadful night, ſo big with terror?—
Here, with the midnight ſhades, here will I ſit,
[*Sitting down.*
A prey to dire deſpair, and ceaſeleſs weep
The hours away—Bleſs me—I heard a noiſe——
[*Starting up.*
No—I miſtook—Nothing but ſilence reigns
And awful midnight round—Again!—O Heavens!
My lord the king!

SCENE VI.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

Be not alarm'd, my love!

SIGISMUNDA.

My royal lord! why at this midnight hour,
How came you hither?

TANCRED.

By that ſecret way
My love contriv'd, when we, in happier days,
Us'd to devote theſe hours, ſo much in vain,
To vows of love and everlaſting friendſhip.

SIGISMUNDA.

Why will you thus perſiſt to add new ſtings
To her diſtreſs, who never can be thine?
O fly me! fly! You know——

TANCRED.

I know too much.
O how I could reproach thee, Sigiſmunda!
Pour out my injur'd ſoul in juſt complaints!
But now the time permits not, theſe ſwift moments—
I told thee how thy father's artifice
Forc'd me to ſeem perfidious in thy eyes.
Ah, fatal blindneſs! not to have obſerv'd
The mingled pangs of rage and love that ſhook me:
When, by my cruel public ſituation
Compell'd, I only feign'd conſent, to gain

A little time, and more ſecure thee mine.
E'er ſince—a dreadful interval of care!
My thoughts have been employ'd, not without hope,
How to defeat Siffredi's barbarous purpoſe.
But thy credulity has ruin'd all,
Thy raſh, thy wild—I know not what to name it——
Oh, it has prov'd the giddy hopes of man
To be deluſion all, and ſickening folly!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah, generous Tancred! ah thy truth deſtroys me!
Yes, yes, 'tis I, 'tis I alone am falſe!
My haſty rage, join'd to my tame ſubmiſſion,
More than the moſt exalted filial duty
Could e'er demand, has daſh'd our cup of fate
With bitterneſs unequall'd—But, alas!
What are thy woes to mine?—to mine! juſt Heaven!—
Now is thy turn of vengeance—hate, renounce me!
O leave me to the fate I well deſerve,
To ſink in hopeleſs miſery!—at leaſt,
Try to forget the worthleſs Sigiſmunda!

TANCRED.

Forget thee! No! Thou art my ſoul itſelf!
I have no thought, no hope, no wiſh but thee!
Even this repented injury, the fears,
That rouſe me all to madneſs, at the thought
Of loſing thee, the whole collected pains
Of my full heart, ſerve but to make thee dearer!
Ah, how forget thee!—Much muſt be forgot,
Ere Tancred can forget his Sigiſmunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

But you, my lord, muſt make that great effort

TANCRED.

Can Sigiſmunda make it?

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! I know not
With what ſucceſs—But all that feeble woman
And love-entangled reaſon can perform,
I, to the utmoſt, will exert to do it.

TANCRED.

Fear not—'tis done!—If thou canſt form the thought,
Succeſs is ſure—I am forgot already!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah Tancred!—But, my lord, reſpect me more.
Think who I am—What can you now propoſe?

TANCRED.

To claim the plighted vows which Heaven has heard,
To vindicate the rights of holy love
By faith and honour bound, to which compar'd
Theſe empty forms, which have enſnar'd thy hand,
Are impious guile, abuſe, and profanation——
Nay, as a king, whoſe high prerogative
By this unlicens'd marriage is affronted,
To bid the laws themſelves pronounce it void.

SIGISMUNDA.

Honour, my lord, is much too proud to catch
At every ſlender twig of nice diſtinctions.
Theſe for th' unfeeling vulgar may do well:
But thoſe, whoſe ſouls are by the nicer rule
Of virtuous delicacy nobly ſway'd,
Stand at another bar than that of laws.
Then ceaſe to urge me—Since I am not born

To that exalted fate to be your queen—
Or, yet a dearer name—to be your wife!——
I am the wife of an illuſtrious lord
Of your own princely blood; and what I am,
I will with proper dignity remain.
Retire, my royal lord—There is no means
To cure the wounds this fatal day has given.
We meet no more!

TANCRED.

Oh barbarous Sigiſmunda!
And canſt thou talk thus ſteadily? thus treat me
With ſuch unpitying, unrelenting rigour?
Poor is the love, that rather than give up
A little pride, a little formal pride,
The breath of vanity! can bear to ſee
The man, whoſe heart was once ſo dear to thine
By many a tender vow ſo mix'd together,
A prey to anguiſh, fury and diſtraction!—
Thou canſt not ſurely make me ſuch a wretch,
Thou canſt not, Sigiſmunda!—Yet relent,
O ſave us yet!—Rodolpho, with my guards,
Waits in the garden—Let us ſeize the moments
We ne'er may have again—With more than power
I will aſſert thee mine, with faireſt honour.
The world ſhall even approve; each honeſt boſom
Swell with a kindred joy to ſee us happy.

SIGISMUNDA.

The world approve! What is the world to me?
The conſcious mind is its own awful world.——
And yet, perhaps, if thou wert not a king,
I know not, Tancred, what I might have done.
Then, then, my conduct, ſanctify'd by love,
Could not be deem'd, by the ſevereſt judge,

The mean effect of intereſt or ambition.
But now not all my partial heart can plead,
Shall ever ſhake th' unalterable dictates
That tyrannize my breaſt.

TANCRED.

'Tis well—No more—
I yield me to my fate—Yes, yes inhuman!
Since thy barbarian heart is ſteel'd by pride,
Shut up to love and pity, here behold me
Caſt on the ground, a vile and abject wretch!
Loſt to all cares, all dignities, all duties!
Here will I grow, breathe out my faithful ſoul,
Here at thy feet—Death, death alone ſhall part us!

SIGISMUNDA.

Have you then vow'd to drive me to perdition?
What can I more?—Yes, Tancred! once again
I will forget the dignity my ſtation
Commands me to ſuſtain—for the laſt time
Will tell thee, that, I fear, no ties, no duty,
Can ever root thee from my hapleſs boſom.
O leave me! fly me! were it but in pity!
To ſee what once we tenderly have lov'd,
Cut off from every hope—cut off for ever!
Is pain thy generoſity ſhould ſpare me,
Then riſe, my lord; and if you truly love me;
If you reſpect my honour, nay, my peace,
Retire! for tho' th' emotions of my heart
Can ne'er alarm my virtue; yet, alas!
They tear it ſo, they pierce it with ſuch anguiſh—
Oh, 'tis too much!—I cannot bear the conflict!

SCENE VII.

TANCRED, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND, *entering.*

Turn, tyrant! turn! and anſwer to my honour,
For this thy baſe inſufferable outrage!

TANCRED.

Inſolent traitor! think not to eſcape
Thyſelf my vengeance! [*They fight.* Oſmond *falls.*

SIGISMUNDA.

Help here! help!—O Heavens!
[*Throwing herſelf down by him.*
Alas! my lord, what meant your headlong rage?
That faith, which I this day, upon the altar,
To you devoted, is unblemiſh'd, pure,
As veſtal truth; was reſolutely yours,
Beyond the power of aught on earth to ſhake it.

OSMOND.

Perfidious woman! die!———
[*Shortening his ſword, he plunges it into her breaſt.*
And to the grave
Attend a huſband, yet but half aveng'd?

TANCRED.

O horror! horror! execrable villain!

OSMOND.

And, tyrant! thou!—Thou ſhalt not o'er my tomb
Exult—'Tis well—'Tis great!—I die content!—
[*Dies.*

SCENE VIII.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, RODOLPHO, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

TANCRED.

[*Throwing himſelf down by* Sigiſmunda.

Quick! here! bring aid!—All in Palermo bring
Whoſe ſkill can ſave her!—Ah! that gentle boſom
Pours faſt the ſtreams of life.

SIGISMUNDA.

All aid is vain,
I feel the powerful hand of death upon me—
But, oh! it ſheds a ſweetneſs thro' my fate,
That I am thine again; and without blame,
May in my Tancred's arms reſign my ſoul!

TANCRED.

Oh, death is in that voice! ſo gently mild,
So ſadly ſweet, as mixes even with mine
The tears of hovering angels!—Mine again!——
And is it thus the cruel Fates have join'd us!
Are theſe the horrid nuptials they prepare
For love like ours? Is virtue thus rewarded?
Let not my impious rage accuſe juſt Heaven!
Thou, Tancred! Thou! haſt murder'd Sigiſmunda!
That furious man was but the tool of Fate,
I, I the cauſe!—But I will do thee juſtice
On this deaf heart! that to thy tender wiſdom
Refus'd an ear—Yes, death ſhall ſoon unite us!

SIGISMUNDA.

Live, live, my Tancred!—Let my death ſuffice
To expiate all that may have been amiſs.
May it appeaſe the Fates, avert their fury
From thy propitious reign! Mean-time, of me
And of thy glory mindful, live, I charge thee,
To guard our friends, and make thy people happy—
[*Obſerving* Siffredi *fixt in aſtoniſhment and grief.*
My father!——Oh! how ſhall I lift my eyes
To thee my ſinking father!

SIFFREDI.

Awful Heaven!
I am chaſtis'd——My deareſt child!——

SIGISMUNDA.

Where am I?
A fearful darkneſs cloſes all around—
My friends! We needs muſt part—I muſt obey
Th' imperious call—Farewel, my Laura! cheriſh
My poor afflicted father's age—Rodolpho,
Now is the time to watch th' unhappy king,
With all the care and tenderneſs of friendſhip—
Oh my dear father! bow'd beneath the weight
Of age and grief—the victim even of virtue,
Receive my laſt adieu!—Where art thou, Tancred?
Give me thy hand—But, ah!—it cannot ſave me
From the dire king of terrors, whoſe cold power
Creeps o'er my heart——Oh!

TANCRED.

How theſe pangs diſtract me!
O lift thy gracious eyes;——Thou leav'ſt me then!
Thou leav'ſt me, Sigiſmunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

Yet a moment—
I had, my Tancred, ſomething more to ſay——
Yes——but thy love and tenderneſs for me
Sure makes it needleſs—Harbour no reſentment
Againſt my father; venerate his zeal,
That acted from a principle of goodneſs,
From faithful love to thee—Live, and maintain
My innocence imbalm'd, with holieſt care
Preſerve my ſpotleſs memory!——I die——
ETERNAL MERCY take my trembling ſoul!
Oh! 'tis the only ſting of death to part
From thoſe we love—from thee—farewel, my Tancred!
[*Dies.*

TANCRED.

Thus then!
[*Flying to his ſword, is held by* Rodolpho.

RODOLPHO.

Hold! hold! my lord!—Have you forgot
Your Sigiſmunda's laſt requeſt already?

TANCRED.

Off! ſet me free! Think not to bind me down,
With barbarous friendſhip, to the rack of life!
What hand can ſhut the thouſand thouſand gates,
Which death ſtill opens to the woes of motals?—
I ſhall find means—No power in earth or heaven
Can force me to endure the hateful light,
Thus robb'd of all that lent it joy and ſweetneſs!
Off! traitors! off! or my diſtracted ſoul
Will burſt indignant from this jail of nature,
To where ſhe beckons yonder—No, mild ſeraph!
Point not to life——I cannot linger here,
Cut off from thee, the miſerable pity,

The ſcorn of human kind!——A trampled king!
Who let his mean poor-hearted love, one moment,
To coward prudence ſtoop; who made it not
The firſt undoubting action of his reign,
To ſnatch thee to his throne, and there to ſhield thee,
Thy helpleſs boſom from a ruffian's fury!——
O ſhame! O agony! O the fell ſtings
Of late, of vain repentance!——Ha! my brain
Is all on fire! a wild abyſs of thought!
Th' infernal world diſcloſes! See! behold him!
Lo! with fierce ſmiles he ſhakes the bloody ſteel,
And mocks my feeble tears!—Hence! quickly, hence!
Spurn his vile carcaſs! give it to the dogs!
Expoſe it to the winds and ſcreaming ravens!
Or hurl it down that fiery ſteep to hell,
There with his ſoul to toſs in flames for ever!——
Ah, impotence of rage!—What am I? where?
Sad, ſilent, all?—The forms of dumb deſpair,
Around ſome mournful tomb!—What do I ſee?
This ſoft abode of innocence and love
Turn'd to the houſe of death! a place of horror!——
Ah! that poor corſe! pale! pale! deform'd with murder!
Is that my Sigiſmunda!

[*Throwing himſelf down by her.*

SIFFREDI.

[*After a pathetic pauſe, looking on the ſcene before him.*

Have I liv'd
To theſe enfeebled years, by Heaven reſerv'd
To be a dreadful monument of juſtice!——
Rodolpho, raiſe the king, and bear him hence
From this diſtracting ſcene of blood and death.
Alas! I dare not give him my aſſiſtance;
My care would only more inflame his rage.

Behold the fatal work of my dark hand,
That by rude force the paſſions would command,
That ruthleſs ſought to root them from the breaſt;
They may be rul'd, but will not be oppreſt.
Taught hence, ye parents, who from nature ſtray,
And the great ties of ſocial life betray;
Ne'er with your children act a tyrant's part:
'Tis yours to guide, not violate the heart:
Ye vainly wiſe, who o'er mankind preſide,
Behold my righteous woes, and drop your pride!
Keep Virtue's ſimple path before your eyes,
Nor think from evil good can ever riſe.

EPILOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MISS BUDGELL.

CRAMM'D to the throat with wholeſome moral ſtuff,
Alas! poor audience! you have had enough.
Was ever hapleſs heroine of a play
In ſuch a piteous plight as ours to-day?
Was ever woman ſo by love betray'd?
Match'd with two huſbands, and yet—die a maid.
But bleſs me!—hold—What ſounds are theſe I hear!—
I ſee the Tragic Muſe herſelf appear.

The back-ſcene opens, and diſcovers a romantic Sylvan landſkip; from which Mrs. Cibber, in the character of the Tragic Muſe, advances ſlowly to muſic, and ſpeaks the following lines:

Hence with your flippant epilogue, that tries
To wipe the virtuous tear from Britiſh eyes;
That dares my moral, tragic ſcene profane,
With ſtrains—at beſt, unſuiting, light and vain,
Hence from the pure unſully'd beams that play
In yon fair eyes where virtue ſhines—Away!

Britons, to you from chaſte Caſtalian groves,
Where dwell the tender, oft unhappy loves;
Where ſhades of heroes roam, each mighty name,
And court my aid to riſe again to fame;
To you I come, to Freedom's nobleſt ſeat,
And in Britannia fix my laſt retreat.

EPILOGUE.

In Greece and Rome, I watch'd the public weal;
The purple tyrant trembled at my ſteel:
Nor did I leſs o'er private ſorrows reign,
And mend the melting heart with ſofter pain.
On France and You then roſe my brightning ſtar,
With ſocial ray—The Arts are ne'er at war.
O, as your fire and genius ſtronger blaze,
As yours are generous Freedom's bolder lays,
Let not the Gallic taſte leave yours behind,
In decent manners and in life refin'd;
Baniſh the motly mode, to tag low verſe,
The laughing ballad to the mournful herſe.
When thro' five acts your hearts have learnt to glow,
Touch'd with the ſacred force of honeſt woe;
O keep the dear impreſſion on your breaſt,
Nor idly loſe it for a wretched jeſt.

CORIOLANUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

PROLOGUE.

WRITTEN BY

The Hon. GEORGE LYTTLETON, Eſq.

SPOKEN BY MR. QUIN.

I COME not here your candour to implore
For ſcenes, whoſe author is, alas! no more;
He wants no advocate his cauſe to plead;
You will yourſelves be patrons of the dead.
No party his benevolence confin'd,
No ſect—alike it flow'd to all mankind.
He lov'd his friends (forgive this guſhing tear:
Alas! I feel I am no actor here)
He lov'd his friends with ſuch a warmth of heart,
So clear of int'reſt, ſo devoid of art,
Such generous friendſhip, ſuch unſhaken zeal,
No words can ſpeak it, but our tears may tell.——
O candid truth, O faith without a ſtain,
O manners gently firm, and nobly plain,
O ſympathizing love of others bliſs,
Where will you find another breaſt like his?
Such was the man—the poet well you know:
Oft has he touch'd your hearts with tender woe:
Oft in this crowded houſe, with juſt applauſe
You heard him teach fair Virtue's pureſt laws;
For his chaſte Muſe employ'd her heav'n-taught lyre
None but the nobleſt paſſions to inſpire,
Not one immoral, one corrupted thought,
One line, which dying he could wiſh to blot.
Oh, may to-night your favourable doom
Another laurel add to grace his tomb:
Whilſt he, ſuperior now to praiſe or blame,
Hears not the feeble voice of human fame.
Yet if to thoſe, whom moſt on earth he lov'd,
From whom his pious care is now remov'd,

PROLOGUE.

With whom his liberal hand, and bounteous heart,
Shar'd all his little fortune could impart;
If to thoſe friends your kind regard ſhall give
What they no longer can from his receive,
That, that, even now, above yon ſtarry pole,
May touch with pleaſure his immortal ſoul.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

CAIUS MARCIUS CORIOLANUS,	Mr. QUIN.
ATTIUS TULLUS, General of the Volſcian army,	Mr. RYAN.
GALESUS, one of the deputies of the Volſcian ſtates attending the camp,	Mr. DELANE.
The other deputies of the Volſcian ſtates.	
VOLUSIUS, one of the principal Volſcian officers,	Mr. SPARKS.
TITUS, freed-man of Galeſus,	Mr. RIDOUT.
MARCUS MINUCIUS, Conſul and principal of the deputation from Rome to Coriolanus,	Mr. BRIDGWATER.
POSTHUMUS COMINIUS, a conſular ſenator, one of the deputation, and who had been the Roman General at the taking of Corioli,	Mr. ANDERSON.
VETURIA, mother of Coriolanus,	Mrs. WOFFINGTON.
VOLUMNIA, wife of Coriolanus,	Miſs BELLAMY.

ROMAN Senators, Prieſts, Augurs, &c. of the firſt deputation. ROMAN Ladies in the train of VETURIA and VOLUMNIA, of the ſecond deputation.

VOLSCIAN OFFICERS, LICTORS, SOLDIERS, &c.

SCENE, The Volſcian Camp.

CORIOLANUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The VOLSCIAN *Camp.*

ATTIUS TULLUS, VOLUSIUS.

VOLUSIUS.

WHENCE is it, Tullus, that our arms are ſtopt
Here on the borders of the Roman ſtate?
Why ſleeps that ſpirit, whoſe heroic ardor
Urg'd you to break the truce, and pour'd our hoſt,
From all th' united cantons of the Volſci,
On their unguarded frontier? Such deſigns
Brook not an hour's delay; their whole ſucceſs
Depends on inſtant vigorous execution.

TULLUS.

Voluſius, I approve thy brave impatience;
And will to thee, in confidence of friendſhip,
Diſcloſe my ſecret ſoul. Thou know'ſt Galeſus,

Whoſe freedom Caius Marcius, once his gueſt,
Of all the ſpoil of ſack'd Corioli,
Alone demanded; and who thence to Rome,
From gratitude and friendſhip, followed Marcius;
Whence lately to our Antium he return'd,
With overtures of peace propos'd by Rome.

VOLUSIUS.

I know him well; an antiquated ſage
Of that romantic ſchool Pythagoras
Eſtabliſh'd here on our Heſperian ſhore;
Whoſe gentle dictates only ſerve to tame
Enfeebled mortals into ſlaves.

TULLUS.

Galeſus,
Doubtleſs, poſſeſſes many civil virtues;
Is gentle, good; for rectitude of heart,
And innocence of life by all rever'd.

VOLUSIUS.

Pardon me, Tullus, if my faithful bluntneſs
Deems you too liberal in his praiſe. In peace
Such may perhaps do well, when prating rules
An idle world; but in tempeſtuous times
They are ſtark naught, theſe viſionary ſtateſmen
Fit rulers only for their golden age.
The rugged genius of rapacious Rome
For other men, and other counſels, calls.

TULLUS.

Your thoughts are mine—I only meant to tell thee
The part he bears in this ill-tim'd delay.
Soon as our gather'd army march'd from Antium,
The Roman ſenate, whoſe attentive caution

Watch'd all our motions, took at once th' alarm;
And ſent a herald, ere we paſs'd their borders,
With formal ceremony, to demand
The cauſe of our approach.—Had I been maſter,
I would have anſwer'd at the gates of Rome.
But this Galeſus, who attends our camp
Among the Volſcian deputies, ſo pleaded
The laws of nations, made ſuch loud complaints
Againſt th' infraction of the public faith,
So teaz'd us with the pedantry of ſtates,
That I was forc'd, unwilling, to permit
His freedman Titus, to be ſent to Rome
With our demands. If theſe the ſenate grants,
We then are in the toils of peace entangled,
In ſpite of all my efforts to avoid them.

VOLUSIUS.

O, 'tis a wild chimera! Peace with Rome!
Dream not of that, unleſs the Volſcian courage
Is quite ſubdu'd, and only ſeeks to gild
A vile ſubmiſſion with that ſpecious name.
Learn wiſdom from your neighbours. Peace with Rome
Has quell'd the Latines, tam'd their free-born ſpirit,
And by her friendſhip honour'd them with chains.

TULLUS.

She ne'er will grant it on the juſt conditions
I now have brought the Volſci to demand:
The reſtitution of our conquer'd cities,
And fair alliance upon equal terms.
I know the Roman inſolence will ſcorn
To yield to this: and Titus muſt return,
Within three days, the longeſt term allow'd him;
Of which the third is near elaps'd already.

Then even Galeſus will not dare to ſtop us
With ſuperſtitious forms, and ſolemn trifles,
From letting looſe th' unbridled rage of war
Againſt thoſe hated tyrants of Heſperia.

VOLUSIUS.

Thanks to the gods! my ſword will then be free.
Then, poor Corioli! thy bleeding wounds,
Thy treaſures ſack'd, thy captive matrons,
Shall amply be reveng'd by thy Voluſius:
Then, Tullus, from the lofty brows of Marcius
Thou may'ſt regain the wreaths his conquering hand,
By partial fortune aided, tore from thine.

TULLUS.

O my Voluſius! thou, who art a ſoldier,
A try'd and brave one too, ſay, in thy heart
Doſt thou not ſcorn me? thou who ſaw'ſt me bend
Beneath the half-ſpent thunder of a foe,
Warm from the conqueſt of Corioli,
Which, ruſhing furious in with thoſe, whoſe ſally
He had repell'd, he ſeiz'd almoſt alone;
And gave to fire and ſword. Yet thence he flew
Scorning the plunder of our richeſt city,
His wounds undreſt, without a moment's reſpite,
To where our armies on the fearful edge
Of battle ſtood; and, aſking of the conſul
To be oppos'd to me, with mighty rage,
Reſiſtleſs, bore us down.

VOLUSIUS.

True valour, Tullus,
Lies in the mind, the never-yielding purpoſe,
Nor owns the blind award of giddy Fortune.

TULLUS.

My ſoul, my friend, my ſoul is all on fire!
Thirſt of revenge conſumes me! the revenge
Of generous emulation, not of hatred.
This happy Roman, this proud Marcius haunts me.
Each troubled night when ſlaves and captives ſleep,
Forgetful of their chains, I, in my dreams,
Anew am vanquiſh'd; and, beneath the ſword
With horror ſinking, feel a tenfold death,
The death of honour. But I will redeem—
Yes, Marcius, I will yet redem my fame.
To face thee once again is the great purpoſe
For which alone I live—Till then how ſlow,
How tedious lags the time! while ſhame corrodes me,
With many a bitter thought; and injur'd honour
Sick, and deſponding, preys upon itſelf.

VOLUSIUS.

It faſt approaches now, the hour of vengeance,
To this fam'd land, to ancient Latium due.
Unbalanc'd Rome, at variance with herſelf,
To order loſt, in deep and hot commotion,
Stands on the dangerous point of civil war;
Her haughty nobles, and ſeditious commons
Reviling, fearing, hating one another:
While, on our part, all wears a proſperous face;
Our troops united, numerous, high in ſpirit,
As if their gen'ral's ſoul inform'd them all.
O long-expected day!

TULLUS.

Go, brave Voluſius,
Go breathe thy ardor into every breaſt,
That when the Volſcian envoy ſhall return,
Whom ere the cloſe of evening I expect,

One ſpirit may unite us in the cauſe
Of generous freedom, and our native rights,
So long oppreſs'd by Rome's encroaching power.

SCENE II.

TULLUS *alone.*

Galeſus ſaid that Marcius ſtands for conſul.
O favour thou his ſuit, propitious Jove!
That I may brave him at his army's head,
In all the majeſty of ſovereign pow'r!
That the whole conduct of the war may reſt
On us alone, and prove by its deciſion,
Which of the two is worthieſt to command——

SCENE III.

TULLUS, OFFICER.

TULLUS.

Ha! why this haſte? you look alarm'd.

OFFICER.

My lord,
One of exalted port, his viſage hid,
Has plac'd himſelf upon your ſacred hearth,
Beneath the dread protection of your Lares;
And ſits majeſtic there in ſolemn ſilence.

TULLUS.

Did you not aſk him who, and what he was?

OFFICER.

My lord, I could not ſpeak; I felt appall'd,
As if the preſence of ſome God had ſtruck me.

TULLUS.

Come, daſtard! let me find this man of terrors.

SCENE IV.

The back-ſcene opens, and diſcovers CORIOLANUS *as deſcribed above.*

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

TULLUS, *after ſome ſilence.*

Illuſtrious ſtranger—for thy high demeanour
Beſpeaks thee ſuch—who art thou?

CORIOLANUS,

[*Riſing and unmuffling his face.*

View me, Tullus—

[*After ſome pauſe.*

Doſt thou not know me?

TULLUS,

No. That noble front
I never ſaw before. What is thy name?

CORIOLANUS,

Does not the ſecret voice of hoſtile inſtinct,
Does not thy ſwelling heart declare me to thee?

TULLUS,

Gods! can it be?—

CORIOLANUS,

Yes. I am Caius Marcius;
Known to thy ſmarting country by the name
Of Coriolanus. That alone is left me,
That empty name, for all my toils, my ſervice,

The blood which I have ſhed for thankleſs Rome.
Behold me baniſh'd thence, a victim yielded
By her weak nobles to the maddening rabble.
I ſeek revenge. Thou may'ſt employ my ſword,
With keener edge, with heavier force againſt her,
Than e'er it fell upon the Volſcian nation.
But if thou, Tullus, doſt refuſe me this,
The only wiſh of my collected heart,
Where every paſſion in one burning point
Concenters, give me death: Death from thy hand
I ſure have well deſerv'd—Nor ſhall I bluſh
To take or life or death from Attius Tullus.

TULLUS.

O Caius Marcius! in this one ſhort moment,
That we have friendly talk'd, my raviſh'd heart
Has undergone a great, a wonderous change.
I ever held thee in my beſt eſteem;
But this heroic confidence has won me,
Stampt me at once thy friend. I were indeed
A wretch as mean as this thy truſt is noble,
Could I refuſe thee thy demand—Yes, Marcius!
Thou haſt thy wiſh! take half of my command,
If that be not enough, then take the whole.
We have, my friend, a gallant force on foot,
An army, Marcius, fit to follow thee.
Go lead them on, and take thy full revenge.
All ſhould unite to puniſh the ungrateful;
Ingratitude is treaſon to mankind.

CORIOLANUS, *embracing him.*

Thus, generous Tullus, take a ſoldier's thanks,
Who is not practis'd in the gloſs of words——
Thou friend in deed! friend to my cauſe, my quarrel!

Friend to the darling paſſion of my ſoul!
All elſe I ſet at nought!—Immortal gods!
I am new-made, and wonder at myſelf!
A little while ago, and I was nothing;
A powerleſs reptile, crawling on the earth,
Curs'd with a ſoul that reſtleſs wiſh'd to wield
The bolts of Jove! I dwelt in Erebus,
I wander'd thro' the hopeleſs gloom of hell,
Stung with revenge, tormented by the furies!
Now, Tullus, like a god, you draw me thence,
Throne me amidſt the ſkies, with tempeſt charg'd,
And put the ready thunder in my hand!

TULLUS.

What I have promis'd, Marcius, I will do.
Within an hour at fartheſt we expect
The freedman of Galeſus back from Rome,
Who carried to the ſenate our demands.
Their anſwer will, I doubt not, end the truce,
And inſtant draw our angry ſwords againſt them.
Till then retire within my inmoſt tent,
Unknown to all but me, that when our chiefs
Meet in full council to declare for war,
I may produce thee to their wondering eyes,
As if deſcended from avenging Heaven
To humble lofty Rome, and teach her juſtice.

CORIOLANUS.

To thy direction, Tullus, I reſign
My future life; my fate is in thy hands;
And, if I judge aright, the fate of Rome.

ACT II. SCENE I.

GALESUS, TITUS.

GALESUS.

INDEED! my Titus, I had hopes that Rome,
Vext as ſhe is with her domeſtic broils,
Her frontier weak, her armies unprepar'd,
Might have comply'd with our demands, and given us
The ſame alliance granted to the Latines.

TITUS.

The ſenate ſcarce would hear the terms I offer'd;
But order'd me to bear this anſwer back:
" If firſt the Volſci take up arms, the Romans
" Will be the laſt to lay them down."

GALESUS.

Alas!
This anſwer ſeals the doom of many a wretch.
Unchain'd Bellona from her temple ruſhes,
With all the crimes and vices in her train.
Earth fades at her approach. To rural peace,
Fair plenty, and the ſocial joy of cities,
Soon will ſucceed rage, rapine, devaſtation,
Each cruel horror ſanctify'd by names.
O mortals! mortals! when will you, content
With Nature's bounty, that in fuller flow,
Still as your labours open more its ſources,
Abundant guſhes o'er the happy world;
When will you baniſh violence and outrage,
To dwell with beaſts of prey in woods and deſerts?

TITUS.

Never till Rome ſhall change her conquering maxims.

GALESUS.

Her haughty ſpirit now will ſoar beyond
Its uſual pitch, upborn by Caius Marcius.
Stands he not for the conſulate?

TITUS.

He did.
But is no more a citizen of Rome.

GALESUS.

What mean'ſt thou, Titus?

TITUS.

Marcius is from Rome
Baniſh'd for ever.

GALESUS.

O immortal Powers!
On what pretence could they to exile doom
Their wiſeſt captain, and their braveſt ſoldier?
Nor leſs renown'd for piety, for juſtice,
An uncorrupted heart, and pureſt manners.

TITUS.

The charge againſt him was entirely groundleſs,
What not his enemies themſelves believ'd,
Affecting of tyrannic power in Rome.
His real crime was only ſome hot words,
Struck from his fiery temper, in the ſenate,
Againſt thoſe factious miniſters of diſcord,
The tribunes of the people. They to rage,
And frantic fury, rous'd the mad plebeians;
By whom ſupported in their bold attempt,

They durſt preſume to ſummon to the bar
Of an enrag'd and partial populace,
The moſt illuſtrious ſenator of Rome.
To this the nobles yielded—and, with his,
Gave up their own and children's rights for ever.

GALESUS.

O ſhameful weakneſs in a Roman ſenate,
So much renown'd for firmneſs! yet my Titus,
Spite of my love to Marcius, I muſt own it,
The vigorous ſoil whence his heroic virtues
Luxuriant riſe, if not with careful hand
Severely weeded, teems with imperfections.
His lofty ſpirit brooks no oppoſition.
His rage, if once offended, knows no bounds.
He deems plebeians with patrician blood
Compar'd, the creatures of a lower ſpecies,
Mere menial hands by Nature meant to ſerve him.

TITUS.

It was this high patrician pride undid him.
The furious people triumph'd in his ruin
As if they had expell'd another Tarquin:
While, like a captive train, the vanquiſh'd nobles
Hung their dejected heads in ſilent ſhame.
Marcius alone ſeem'd unconcern'd; tho' deep
The latent tempeſt boil'd within his breaſt,
Choak'd up and ſmother'd with exceſſive rage.

GALESUS.

You were his gueſt at Rome, and therefore, Titus,
Might on this ſad occaſion be permitted
To join your tears with his domeſtic friends.
Saw you that moving ſcene?

TITUS.

I did, Galeſus.
I follow'd Marcius home—His mother, there,
Veturia, the moſt venerable matron
Theſe eyes have e'er beheld, and ſoft Volumnia,
His lovely virtuous wife amidſt his children,
Spread on the ground, lay loſt in dumb deſpair.
He ſwelling ſtood a while, and could not ſpeak,
Th' affronted hero ſtruggling with the man;
Then thus at laſt he broke the gloomy ſilence;
" 'Tis done. The guilty ſentence is pronounc'd.
" Ungrateful Rome has caſt me from her boſom.
" Support this blow with fortitude and courage,
" As it becomes two generous Roman matrons.
" I recommend my children to your care.
" Farewel. I go, I quit, without regret,
" A city grown an enemy to virtue."

GALESUS.

Oh godlike Marcius! oh unconquer'd ſtrength
And dignity of mind! How much ſuperior
Is ſuch a ſoul to all the power of Fortune!

TITUS.

This ſaid, he ſternly try'd to break away:
When, holding in his hand his eldeſt ſon,
Veturia follow'd; while the poor Volumnia,
All drown'd in tears, and bearing in one arm
Their youngeſt, yet an infant, with the other
Hung clinging at his knees—he turning to them,
Half ſoften'd, half ſevere, breath'd from his ſoul
Theſe broken accents—" Ceaſe your vain complaints,
" Mother, you have no more a ſon; and thou,
" Thou beſt of women! thou, my dear Volumnia!
" No more a huſband."—Pierc'd with theſe dire words

Volumnia lifeleſs ſunk: and off he flung,
With wild precipitation.

GALESUS.

Thy ſad tale
Blinds my old eyes with tears—But whither, tell me,
O whither, Titus, bent he then his courſe?

TITUS.

Where the blind genius of regardleſs rage
And deſperation led. On to the gate
Capena call'd, attended by the nobles,
He ſtalk'd in ſullen majeſty along;
Nor deign'd a word. A godlike virtuous anger
Beam'd thro' his features, and ſublim'd his air.
With downcaſt eyes he walk'd; or, if aſide
He chanc'd to look, each look was great reproach.
Thus in emphatic ſilence, that made words
Void and inſipid all, he parted from them,
The day preceding my return from Rome;
Nor has been heard of ſince, loſt in th' abyſs
Of his own woes.

GALESUS.

O Marcius, noble Marcius!
How ſhall my friendſhip ſuccour thy diſtreſs?
Where ſhall I find thee to partake thy ſorrows,
And make myſelf companion of thy exile?
But, Titus, we indulge diſcourſe too long—
Go, and aſſemble thou the Volſcian chiefs,
Whilſt I repair to Tullus, to inform,
And bring him to the council, there to hear
The fatal anſwer thou haſt brought from Rome.

SCENE II.

Changes to TULLUS's *Tent.*

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Forgive me, Tullus, if I count the moments
That ſtop the purpoſe of thy noble kindneſs,
And keep me here confin'd in tame inaction.
Why lingers Titus?

TULLUS.

Calm thy reſtleſs heart,
Brave Marcius; every minute I expect him.
Soon from the cloud that hides thee, ſhalt thou break
With double brightneſs; ſoon thy fiery rage
Shall wither all the ſtrength and pride of Rome.

CORIOLANUS.

O righteous Jove, protector of the injur'd!
If from my earlieſt youth, with pious awe,
I ſtill have reverenc'd thy all-powerful juſtice,
Still by her ſacred dictates rul'd my actions;
O let that juſtice now ſupport my cauſe,
And arm my ſtrong right-hand with all her terrors!
When that is done, be life or death my lot,
As thy almighty pleaſure ſhall determine.

[*Enter an Officer to* Tullus.

OFFICER.

My lord, Galeſus aſks admittance to you.

TULLUS.

Marcius, retire an inſtant, till I hear
The buſineſs brings him hither—Bid him enter.

[*Exit* Officer *and* Coriolanus.

[*Enter* Galeſus.

SCENE III.

TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

Tullus, the Roman ſenate has return'd
No other anſwer, to our late demands,
But abſolute denial and defiance.

TULLUS.

It is what I expected—We ſhall teach them
An humbler language ſoon—Haſt thou aſſembled,
As I deſir'd, the Volſcian chiefs in council?

GALESUS.

Titus is gone to ſummon their attendance.

TULLUS.

It is enough, come forth, my noble gueſt!
And ſhew Galeſus how the gods aſſiſt us.

SCENE IV.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

O my aſtoniſh'd ſoul! what do I ſee?
What! Caius Marcius! Caius Marcius here,
Beneath one tent with Tullus!

TULLUS.

Ay, and more,
With Tullus, now his friend and fellow-ſoldier.
Yes, thou ſhalt ſee him thundering at the head
Of Volſcian armies, he, who oft has carry'd
Deſtruction thro' their ranks—Your leave a moment,
While to our chiefs and fathers, I announce
Their unexpected gueſt.

SCENE V.

CORIOLANUS, GALESUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Thou good old man!
Cloſe let me ſtrain thee to my faithful heart,
Which now is doubly thine, united more
By the protection which thy country gives me,
Than by our former friendſhip.

GALESUS.

Strange event!
This is thy work, almighty Providence!
Whoſe power, beyond the ſtretch of human thought,
Revolves the orbs of empire; bids them ſink
Deep in the deadning night of thy diſpleaſure,
Or riſe majeſtic o'er a wondering world.
The gods by thee—I ſee it, Coriolanus,—
Mean to exalt us, and depreſs the Romans.

CORIOLANUS.

Galeſus, yes, the gods have ſent me hither;
Thoſe righteous gods, who, when vindictive juſtice
Excites them to deſtroy a worthleſs people,
Make their own crimes and follies ſtrike the blow.

GALESUS.

Cheriſh theſe thoughts that teach us what we are,
And tame the pride of man. There is a power
Unſeen that rules th' illimitable world,
That guides its motions, from the brighteſt ſtar,
To the leaſt duſt of this ſin-tainted mold;
While man, who madly deems himſelf the lord
Of all, is nought but weakneſs and dependance.
This ſacred truth, by ſure experience taught,
Thou muſt have learnt, when, wandering all alone,
Each bird, each inſect, flitting thro' the ſky,
Was more ſufficient for itſelf, than thou——
Ah the full image of thy woes diſſolves me!
The pangs that muſt have torn, at parting from thee,
Thy mother and thy wife. I cannot think
Of that ſad ſcene, without ſome drops of pity!

CORIOLANUS.

Who was it forc'd me to that bitter parting?
Who, in one cruel, haſty moment, chas'd me
From wife, from children, friends, and houſehold gods,
Me! who ſo often had protected theirs?
Who, from the ſacred city of my fathers,
Drove me with Nature's commoners to dwell,
To lodge beneath their wide unſheltered roof,
And at their table feed? O blaſt me, gods!
With every woe! debility of mind,
Diſhonour, juſt contempt, and palſy'd weakneſs,
If I forgive the villains! yes, Galeſus,
Yes, I will offer to the powers of vengeance
A great, a glorious victim—a whole city!——
Why, Tullus, this delay?

GALESUS.

May Coriolanus
Be to the Volſcian nation, and himſelf,

The dread, the godlike inſtrument of juſtice!
But let not rage and vengeance mix their rancour;
Let them not trouble with their fretful ſtorm,
Their angry gleams, that azure, where enthron'd
The calm divinity of Juſtice ſits,
And pities, while ſhe puniſhes, mankind.

CORIOLANUS.

What ſaidſt thou? What, againſt the Powers of vengeance?
The gods gave honeſt Anger, juſt Revenge,
To be the awful guardians of the rights
And native dignity of human kind.
O were it not for them, the ſaucy world
Would grow a noiſome neſt of little tyrants!
Each carrion crow, on eagle merit perch'd,
Would peck his eyes out, and the mungrel cur
At pleaſure bait the lion—No, Galeſus,
I would not raſhly, nor on light occaſion,
Receive the deep impreſſion in my breaſt;
But when the baſe, the brutal and unjuſt,
Or worſe than all, th' ungrateful, ſtamp it there;
O I will then, with luxury ſupreme,
Enjoy the pleaſure of offended gods,
A righteous, juſt revenge!—Behold my ſoul.

[*Enter an* Officer.

OFFICER.

My lords, th' aſſembled chiefs deſire your preſence.

GALESUS.

Come, noble Marcius; let my joyful hand
Conduct thee thither—Doubt not thy reception
Will be proportion'd to thy fame and merit.

SCENE VI.

The back-ſcene opens, and diſcovers the deputies of the Volſcian *States, aſſembled in council. They riſe and ſalute* Coriolanus; *then reſume their places.*

GALESUS, TULLUS, CORIOLANUS, SENATORS.

GALESUS.

Aſſembled ſtates, and captains of the Volſci,
Behold the chief ſo much renown'd in war;
Our once ſo formidable foe, but now
Our proffer'd friend and ſoldier—Caius Marcius.

FIRST SENATOR.

We give him hearty welcome from our ſouls.

CORIOLANUS.

Moſt noble chiefs, and fathers of the Volſci,
I need not ſay, how by the people's rage,
And the poor weakneſs of the timid nobles,
I am expell'd from Rome. Had I confin'd
My wiſhes merely to a ſafe retreat,
Some Latine city might have given me that;
Or any nameleſs corner. What imports it,
Where a tame patient exile rots in ſilence?
But, Volſcian lords, permit me to declare,
I would at once cut ſhort my uſeleſs days,
Rather than be that deſpicable wretch,
Who neither can take vengeance on his foes,
Nor ſerve his friends. That is my temper, chiefs.
I ſhall be glad to merit, by my ſword,
Th' aſylum which I ſeek among the Volſci.

Rome is our common foe: Then let us join
Our common ſufferings, paſſions, and reſentments.
Yes, tho' but one, I bring ſo many wrongs,
So large a ſhare of powerful enmity,
Into the war, as gives me the preſumption,
To offer to the Volſcian ſtates th' alliance
Even of my ſingle arm.——

TULLUS.

That ſingle arm
Is in itſelf a numerous army, Marcius;
The Volſcians ſo eſteem it—But proceed.

CORIOLANUS.

I will not mention, Volſcian chiefs, what talent
The world allows me to poſſeſs in war:
But be that what it will, you may employ it.
Soldier, or captain, in whatever ſtation
You place me, I will loſe each drop of blood,
Or with this hand I'll fix the Volſcian ſtandard
On the proud towers of capitolian Jove.

TULLUS.

Chiefs of the Volcian league, I give you joy
Of our new citizen, the noble Marcius.
The genius of the Volſcian ſtate has ſent him,
Whetted by wrongs into a keener hatred
Than that we bear to Rome. It were contemning,
With impious ſelf-ſufficient arrogance,
This bounty of the gods, not to accept,
With every mark of honour, of his ſervice.
I, Volſcians, I, even Attius Tullus, give,
Firſt of you all, my voice, that Caius Marcius
Be now receiv'd to high command among us;

That inſtantly we do appoint him general
Of half our troops, which here, with your conſent,
I to him yield.—Speak, chiefs, is this your pleaſure?

FIRST SENATOR.

It is—We give unanimous conſent.

TULLUS, *embracing him.*

Marcius, I joy to call thee my companion,
And collegue in this war.

CORIOLANUS.

By all the gods!
Thou art the generous victor of my ſoul!
Yes, Tullus, I am conquer'd by thy virtue.

GALESUS.

Tho' I have oft, on great occaſions, Tullus,
Beheld thee in the ſenate, and the field,
Cover'd with glory; yet, I muſt avow,
I never ſaw thee ſhew ſuch genuine greatneſs,
Such true ſublimity of ſoul, as now.
To ſcorn th' all-powerful charm of ſelfiſh paſſions,
Chiefly the dazzling pride of emulation,
That noble weakneſs of heroic minds,
To ſink thyſelf that thou may'ſt raiſe thy country;
To put the ſword into thy rival's hand,
And twine thy promis'd laurels round his brow—
O 'tis a flight beyond the higheſt point
Of martial glory! and what few can reach.
Go forth, ye choſen miniſters of juſtice;
And may that awful Power, whoſe ſecret hand
Sways all our paſſions, turns our partial views
All to its own dread purpoſes, attend you!

CORIOLANUS.

I burn to enter on the glorious taſk
You now have mark'd me out. How ſlow the time
To the warm ſoul, that, in the very inſtant
It forms, would execute, a great deſign.
'Tis my advice we march direct to Rome;
We cannot be too quick. Let the firſt dawn
See us in bright array before her walls.
Perhaps when they behold their exile there,
Back'd by your force, ſome conſcious hearts among them
May feel th' alarm of guilt.

TULLUS.

I much approve
Of this advice. 'Tis what I thought before,
Ere ſtrengthen'd, Marcius, by thy mighty arm:
But now 'tis doubly right. Here, Volſcian chiefs,
Here let our council terminate—The troops
Have had repoſe ſufficient. Strait to Rome
Come, let us urge our march—As yet the ſtars
Ride in their middle watch; we ſhall with eaſe
Reach it by dawn——

CORIOLANUS.

Yes, we have time—too much!
Six tedious hours till morn—But hence! away!
My ſoul on fire anticipates the dawn.

ACT III. SCENE I.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS, VOLUSIUS, TITUS, *with a crowd of* Volſcian *officers. Acclamations behind the ſcenes.*

CORIOLANUS.

NO more—I merit not this laviſh praiſe.
True, we have driven the Roman legions back,
Defeated, and diſgrac'd—But what is this?
Nothing, ye Volſci, nothing yet is done.
We but begin the wondrous leaf of ſtory,
That marks the Roman doom. At length it dawns,
The deſtin'd hour, that eaſes of their fears
The nations round, and ſets Heſperia free.
Come on, my brave companions of the war!
Come, let us finiſh at one mighty ſtroke
This toil of labouring fate.—We will, or periſh!
While, noble Tullus, you protect the camp,
I, with my troops, all men of choſen valour,
And well-approv'd to-day, will ſtorm the city.

TITUS.

Beneath thy animating conduct, Marcius,
What can the Volſcian valour not perform?
Thy very ſight and voice ſubdues the Romans.
When, lifting up your helm, you ſhew'd your face,
That like a comet glar'd deſtruction on them,
I ſaw their braveſt veterans fly before thee.
Their ancient ſpirit has with thee forſook them,
And ruin hangs o'er yon devoted walls.

[*Enter an* Officer, *who addreſſes himſelf to* Coriolanus.

OFFICER.

My lord, a herald is arriv'd from Rome,
To ſay, a deputation from the ſenate,
Attended by the miniſters of Heaven,
A venerable train of prieſts and flamens,
Is on the way, addreſs'd to you.

CORIOLANUS.

To me!
What can this meſſage mean!—Stand to your arms,
Ye Volſcian troops; and let theſe Romans paſs
Betwixt the lowring frown of double files.
What! do they think me ſuch a milky boy,
To pay my vengeance with a few ſoft words.
Come, fellow ſoldiers, Tullus, come, and ſee,
If I betray the honours you have done me.
[*Goes out with a train of* Volſcian *officers.*

SCENE II.

TULLUS, VOLUSIUS, *who remain.*

VOLUSIUS, *after ſome ſilence.*

Are we not, Tullus, failing in our duty
Not to attend our general?

TULLUS.

How! what ſaidſt thou?

VOLUSIUS.

Methought, my lord, his parting orders were,
We ſhould attend the triumph now preparing

O'er all his foes at once—Romans and Volſci!
Come, we ſhall give offence.

TULLUS.

Of this no more,
I pray thee ſpare thy bitter irony.

VOLUSIUS.

Shall I then ſpeak without diſguiſe?

TULLUS.

Speak out
With all the honeſt bluntneſs of a friend.
Think'ſt thou I fear the truth?

VOLUSIUS.

Then, Tullus, know,
Thou art no more the general of the Volſci.
Thou haſt, by this thy generous weakneſs, ſunk
Thyſelf into a private man of Antium.
Yes, thou haſt taken from thy laurel'd brow
The well-earn'd trophies of thy toils and perils,
Thy ſpringing hopes, the faireſt ever budded,
And heap'd them on a man too proud before.

TULLUS.

He bears it high.

VOLUSIUS.

Death and perdition! high!
With uncontroul'd command!—You ſee, already,
He will not be encumber'd with the fetters
Of our advice. He ſpeaks his ſovereign will;
On every hand he iſſues out his orders,
As to his natural ſlaves.—For you, my lord,
He has, I think, confin'd you to your camp,

There in inglorious indolence to languiſh;
While he, beneath your blaſted eyes, ſhall reap
The harveſt of your honour.

TULLUS.

No, Voluſius,
Whatever honour ſhall by him be gain'd
Reverts to me, from whoſe ſuperior bounty
He drew the means of all his glorious deeds.
This mighty chief, this conqueror of Rome,
Is but my creature.——

VOLUSIUS.

Wretched ſelf-deluſion;
He and the Volſcians know he is thy maſter.
He acts as ſuch in all things.—Now, by Mars,
Could my abhorrent ſoul endure the thought
Of ſtooping to a Roman chief, I here
Would leave thee in thy ſolitary camp,
And go where glory calls.

TULLUS.

Indeed, Voluſius,
I did expect more equal treatment from him.
But what of that?—The generous pride of virtue
Diſdains to weigh too nicely the returns
Her bounty meets with—Like the liberal gods,
From her own gracious nature ſhe beſtows,
Nor ſtoops to aſk reward—Yet muſt I own,
I thought he would not have ſo ſoon forgot
What he ſo lately was, and what I am.

VOLUSIUS.

Gods! knew ye not his character before?
Did you not know his genius was to yours
Averſe, as are antipathies in nature?

High, over-weening, tyrannouſly proud,
And only fit to hold command o'er ſlaves?
Hence, as repugnant to that equal life,
Which is the quickening ſoul of all republics,
The Roman people caſt him forth; and we,
Shall we receive the bane of their repoſe,
Into our breaſt? Are we leſs free than they?
Or ſhall we be more patient of a tyrant?

TULLUS.

All this I knew. But while his imperfections
Are thy glad theme, thou haſt forgot his virtues.

VOLUSIUS.

I leave that ſubject to the ſmooth Galeſus,
And theſe his Volſcian flatterers—His virtues!
Truſt me there is no inſolence that treads
So high as that which rears itſelf on virtue.

TULLUS.

Well, be it ſo—I meant, that even his vices
Should, on this great occaſion, ſerve the Volſci.

VOLUSIUS.

Confuſion! there it is! there lurks the ſting
Of our diſhonour! while this Marcius leads
The Roman armies, ours are driven before him.
Behold, he changes ſides; when with him changes
The fortune of the war. Strait they grow Volſci
And we victorious Romans—Such, no doubt,
Such is his ſecret boaſt—Ay, this vile brand
Succeſs itſelf will fix for ever on us;
And, Tullus, thou, 'tis thou muſt anſwer for it.

TULLUS *aſide.*

His words are daggers to my heart; I feel
Their truth, but am aſham'd to own my folly.

VOLUSIUS.

O ſhame! O infamy! the thought conſumes me,
It ſcalds my eyes with tears, to ſee a Roman
Borne on our ſhoulders to immortal fame:
Juſt in the happy moment that decided
The long diſpute of ages, that for which
Our generous anceſtors had toil'd and bled,
To ſee him then ſtep in and ſteal our glory!
O that we firſt had periſh'd all! A people,
Who cannot find in their own proper force
Their own protection, are not worth the ſaving!

TULLUS.

It muſt have way! I will no more ſuppreſs it—
Know then, my rough old friend, no leſs than thee
His conduct hurts me and upbraids my folly.
I wake as from a dream. What demon mov'd me?
What doating generoſity? his woes,
Was it his woes! To ſee the brave reduc'd
To truſt his mortal foe? perhaps, a little
That work'd within my boſom—But, Voluſius,
That was not all—I will to thee confeſs
The weakneſs of my heart—Yes, it was pride,
The dazzling pride to ſee my rival-warrior
The great Coriolanus, bend his ſoul,
His haughty ſoul, to ſue for my protection.
Protection ſaid I? were it that alone,
I had been baſe to have refus'd him that,
To have refus'd him aught a gallant foe
Owes to a gallant foe.—But to exalt him
To the ſame level, nay, above myſelf;
To yield him the command of half my troops,
The choiceſt acting half—That, that was madneſs!
Was weak, was mean, unworthy of a man!——

VOLUSIUS.

I ſcorn to flatter thee—It was indeed.

TULLUS.

Curſe on the ſlave Galeſus! ſoothing, he
Seiz'd the fond moment of infatuation,
And clinch'd the chains my generous folly forg'd.
How ſhall I from this labyrinth eſcape?
Muſt it then be! what cruel genius dooms me,
In war or peace to creep beneath his fortune?

VOLUSIUS.

That genius is thyſelf. If thou canſt bear
The very thought of ſtooping to this Roman,
Thou from that moment art his vaſſal, Tullus;
By that thou doſt acknowledge, parent Nature
Has form'd him thy ſuperior. But if fix'd
Upon the baſe of manly reſolution,
Thou ſay'ſt—I will be free! I will command!
I and my country! then—O never doubt it—
We ſhall find means to cruſh this vain intruder!
Even I myſelf—this hand——
Nay, hear me, Tullus,
'Tis not yet come to that, that laſt reſource.
I do not ſay we ſhould employ the dagger,
While other, better means are in our power.

TULLUS.

No, my Voluſius, Fortune will not drive us,
Or I am much deceiv'd, to that extreme:
We ſhall not want the ſtrongeſt faireſt plea,
To give a ſolemn ſanction to his fate.
He will betray himſelf. Whate'er his rage

Of paſſion talks, a weakneſs for his country
Sticks in his ſoul, and he is ſtill a Roman.
Soon ſhall we ſee him tempted to the brink
Of this ſure precipice—Then down, at once,
Without remorſe, we hurl him to perdition!
But hark! the trumpet calls us to a ſcene
I ſhould deteſt, if not from hope we thence
May gather matter to mature our purpoſe.

SCENE III.

The back-ſcene opens, and diſcovers Coriolanus *ſitting on his tribunal, attended by his lictors, and a crowd of* Volſcian *officers. Files of troops drawn up on either hand. In the depth of the ſcene appear the deputies from the* Roman *ſenate,* M. Minucius, Poſthumus Cominius, Sp. Lartius, P. Pinnarius, *and* Q. Sulpitius, *all conſular ſenators, who had been his moſt zealous friends. And behind them march the prieſts, the ſacrificers, the augurs, and the guardians of the ſacred things, dreſt in their ceremonial habits. Theſe advance ſlowly betwixt the files of ſoldiers, under arms. As* Tullus *enters,* Coriolanus *riſing ſalutes him.*

CORIOLANUS.

Here, noble Tullus, ſit, and judge my conduct;
Nor ſpare to check me, if I act amiſs.

TULLUS.

Marcius, the Volſcian fate is in thy hands.

[Coriolanus *is ſeated again, and* Tullus *places himſelf upon a tribunal on his left hand. Mean time the* Ro-

man *deputies advance up to* Coriolanus *and ſalute him, which he returns.*

CORIOLANUS.

What, Romans, from the generals of the Volſci
Is your demand?

MINUCIUS.

O Coriolanus, Rome,
Nurſe of thy tender years, thy parent-city,
Her ſenators, her people, prieſts, and augurs,
Her every order and degree, by us,
Thy ever-zealous, ſtill-unſhaken friends,
Sue in the moſt pathetic terms for peace.
And if in this conſtrain'd, we from our maxim,
Never to aſk but give it, muſt depart;
It is ſome conſolation, in the ſtate
To which thou haſt by thy ſuperior valour
Reduc'd us, that we aſk it from a Roman.

CORIOLANUS.

I was a Roman once, and thought the name
Was not diſhonour'd by me; but it pleas'd
Your lords, the mob of Rome, to take it from me;
Nor will I now receive it back again.

MINUCIUS.

The name thou mayſt reject, but canſt not throw
The duties from thee which that name imports;
Indiſſoluble duties, bound upon thee
By the ſtrong hand of Nature, and confirm'd
By the dread ſanction of all-ruling Jove.
Then hear thy country's ſupplicating voice;
By all thoſe duties I conjure thee hear us.

CORIOLANUS.

Well—I will hear thee; ſpeak, declare thy meſſage.

MINUCIUS.

Give peace, give healing peace, to two brave nations,
Fatigu'd with war, and ſick of cruel deeds!
To carry on deſtruction's eaſy trade,
Afflict mankind, and ſcourge the world with war,
Is what each wicked, each ambitious man,
Who lets his furious paſſions looſe, may do:
But in the flattering torrent of ſucceſs,
To check his rage, and drop th' avenging ſword,
When a repenting people aſk it of him,
That is the genuine bounty of a god.
Then urge no farther this your juſt reſentment;
Which, injur'd as you are, you needs muſt feel,
But never ought to carry into action,
Againſt your ſacred country; whence you drew
Your life, your virtues, every mortal good,
That very valour you employ againſt her.
Stop, Coriolanus, ere, beyond retreat,
You plunge yourſelf in crimes. To the fierce joy
Of vengeance puſh'd to barbarous exceſs,
Repentance will ſucceed, and ſickning horror.
Conſider too the ſlippery ſtate of fortune.
The gods take pleaſure oft, when haughty mortals
On their own pride erect a mighty fabric,
By ſlighteſt means, to lay their towering ſchemes
Low in the duſt, and teach them they are nothing.
Return, thou virtuous Roman! to the boſom
Of thy imploring country. Lo! her arms
She fondly ſpreads to take thee back again,
And by redoubled love efface her harſhneſs.
Return, and crown thee with the nobleſt wreath
Which glory can beſtow—the palm of mercy!

CORIOLANUS.

Marcus Minucius, and ye other Romans,
Reſpected ſenators, and holy flamens,
Attend, and take to your demand this anſwer:
Why court you me, the ſervant of the Volſci?
It is to them that you muſt bend for peace,
Which on theſe only terms they will accord you.
" Reſtore the conquer'd lands, your former wars
" Have raviſh'd from them: from their towns and cities,
" Won by your arms, withdraw your colonies;
" And to the full immunities of Rome
" Frankly admit them, as you have the Latines."
Then, Romans, ye have peace, and not till then!
If theſe are terms which ſuit not your ambition,
They ſuit the ſtate to which the Volſcian arms
Have now reduc'd you—We have learn'd from Rome
To uſe our fortune, and command the vanquiſh'd.

TULLUS *aſide.*

Death to my hopes! I'm now his ſlave for ever.

CORIOLANUS, *addreſſing himſelf to the* Volſci.

This, my illuſtrious patrons and protectors,
Volſci, to you I ow'd. Permit me now
To do myſelf and injur'd honour juſtice.
[*Turning again to the* Romans.
As to the liberty you idly vaunt
To give me of returning to your city,
'Tis what I hold unworthy of acceptance.
Can I return into th' ungrateful boſom
Of a diſtracted ſtate, where, to the rage
Of a vile ſenſeleſs populace, the laws
Are by your ſhameful weakneſs given a prey?

Who are the men that hold the ſway among you?
And whom have you expell'd, as even unworthy
To live within the cincture of your walls!—
O the wild thought breaks in and troubles reaſon!—
With what, ye Romans, can the foureſt cenſor,
The moſt envenom'd malice, juſtly charge me?
Did I e'er break your laws? Nay, did I e'er
Do aught that could diſturb the ſacred order,
The peace and ſocial harmony of life;
Or taint your ancient ſanctity of manners?
What was my crime? I could not bear to ſee
Your dignity debas'd, to ſee the rabble
Tread on the reverend grey authority
Of ſenatorial wiſdom: Yes, for you,
In your defence I did enrage this monſter;
And yet you baſely left me to its fury.
Then talk no more of ſervices and friendſhip:
A friend, who can, and does not ſhield, betrays me.
Or if the power was wanting, then your ſenate
Is ſunk into ſervility and bondage,
Nor ſhould a freeman deign to ſit among you.

MINUCIUS.

The wiſeſt are ſometimes compell'd to yield
To popular ſtorms: yet I defend not, Marcius,
Our timid conduct; we have felt our error,
And now invite thee back to aid the ſenate,
With thy heroic ſpirit to reſtrain
The giddy rage of faction, and to hold
The reins of government more firm hereafter.
As to th' appeal which thou haſt nobly made
In vindication of thy ſpotleſs fame,
With pleaſure we confirm it, and bear witneſs
To all thy public and thy private virtues:
But let us alſo beg thee not to ſtain

The brightneſs of that glory by a crime,
Which, unrepented, would diſgrace them all,
A dire rebellious war againſt thy country.

CORIOLANUS.

Abſurd! what can you mean? To call a people,
Who with the laſt indignity have us'd me,
To call my foes my country! No, Minucius,
It is the generous nation of the Volſci;
Theſe brave, theſe virtuous men, you ſee around me,
Who, when I wander'd a poor helpleſs exile,
Took pity of my injuries and woes;
Forgot the former miſchiefs of my ſword;
Heap'd on me kindneſs, honours, dignities;
Fear'd not to truſt me with this high command,
And plac'd me here the guardian of their cauſe:—
Be witneſs, Jove!—It is alone their nation
I henceforth will acknowledge for my country!
Let this ſuffice—You have my anſwer, Romans.

COMINIUS.

This anſwer, Coriolanus, is the dictate
More of thy pride than magnanimity:
'Tis thy revenge that gives it, not thy virtue.
Art thou above the gods? who joy to ſhow'r
Their doubled goodneſs on repenting mortals?
But think not I intend, by this, to urge
Our proffer'd peace, ſo harſhly treated, further.
That were a weakneſs ill becoming Romans.
Yet I muſt tell thee, it would better ſuit
A fierce deſpotic chief of barbarous ſlaves,
Than the calm dignity of one who ſits
In the grave ſenate of a free republic,
To talk ſo high, and as it were to thruſt
Plebeians from the native rights of man.——

CORIOLANUS.

Ha! doſt thou come the people's advocate
To me, Cominius! com'ſt thou to inſult me!

COMINIUS.

Nay, hear me, Marcius:—Theſe grey hairs impower me
To ſet thee right before this great aſſembly:
And there was once a time, thou wouldſt have heard
Thy general with more deference and patience—
I tell thee then, whoe'er amidſt the ſons
Of reaſon, valour, liberty, and virtue,
Diſplays diſtinguiſh'd merit, is a noble
Of Nature's own creating. Such have riſen,
Sprung from the duſt; or where had been our honours?
And ſuch in radiant bands will riſe again,
In yon immortal city, that, when moſt
Depreſs'd by fate, and near apparent ruin,
Returns, as with an energy divine,
On her aſtoniſh'd foes, and ſhakes them from her—
Your pardon, Volſci—But this, Coriolanus,
Is what I had to ſay.

CORIOLANUS.

And I have heard it—

[*Riſing from his tribunal; and the prieſts advancing to addreſs him, he prevents them.*

For you, ye awful miniſters of Heaven,
Let me not hear your holy lips profan'd
By urging what my duty muſt refuſe.
I bow in adoration to the gods;
I venerate their ſervants. But there is,
There is a power, their chief, their darling care,
The guardian of mankind, which to betray
Were violating all—And that is Juſtice.

So far my public character demands;
So far my honour.—Now, what ſhould forbid
The man, and friend, to be indulg'd a little?
Permit me to embrace thee, good Minucius,
Thee, Lartius; you, Pinnarius and Sulpitius:
But chiefly thee, Cominius, who firſt rais'd me
To deeds of arms: who from thy conſular brow
Took thy own crown, and with it circled mine.
Tho' nought can ſhake my purpoſe, yet I wiſh
That Rome had ſent me others on this errand.
I thank you for your friendſhip. The protection,
Which you have given to thoſe, whom once I call'd
By tender names, I would not now remember.
How ſhall I—ſay—return your generous goodneſs?
O, there is nothing you, as friends, can aſk,
My grateful heart will not with pleaſure grant you.

COMINIUS.

We thank thee, Coriolanus—But a Roman
Diſdains that favour you refuſe his country.

CORIOLANUS.

[*To the* Volſcian *officers.*
See that they be, with due regard and ſafety,
Conducted back.
[*To the* Roman *ſenators.*
I will ſuſpend th' aſſault,
Till to theſe terms, of which we will not bate
The ſmalleſt part, your ſenate may have time
To ſend their lateſt anſwer. Then we cut
All further treaty off. Romans, farewel.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

TULLUS, *alone.*

WHAT is the mind of man? A reſtleſs ſcene
Of vanity and weakneſs; ſhifting ſtill,
As ſhift the lights of our uncertain knowledge;
Or as the various gale of paſſion breathes.
None ever thought himſelf more deeply founded
On what is right, nor felt a nobler ardor,
Than I, when I inveſted Caius Marcius
With this ill-judg'd command. Now it appears
Diſtraction, folly, monſtrous folly! meanneſs!
And down I plunge, betray'd even by my virtue,
From gulph to gulph, from ſhame to deeper ſhame.

SCENE II.

TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

I liſten'd, Tullus, to th' important ſcene
That lately paſs'd before us, with moſt ſtrict
Unprejudic'd attention; and have ſince
Revolv'd it in my mind, both as a man,
Ally'd to all mankind, and as a Volſcian.
Indeed our terms are high, and by the manner
In which they were preſcrib'd by Coriolanus,
Are what we cannot hope will e'er be granted.
They ſhould be ſoften'd. Let us yield a little,

Conſcious ourſelves to a great nation's pride,
The pride of human nature. Could the Romans
Stoop to ſuch peace, commanded by the ſword
They then were ſlaves, unworthy our alliance.

TULLUS.

Gods! do I hear in thee, one of the chiefs
Intruſted with the honour of the Volſci,
An advocate for Rome?

GALESUS.

I glory, Tullus,
To own myſelf an advocate for peace.
Peace is the happy natural ſtate of man;
War his corruption, his diſgrace—

TULLUS.

His ſafeguard!
His pride! his glory!—What but war, juſt war,
Gave Greece her heroes? Thoſe who drew the ſword
(As we do now) againſt the ſons of rapine;
To quell proud tyrants, and to free mankind.

GALESUS,

Yes, Tullus, when to juſt defence the warrior
Confines his force, he is a worſhip'd name,
Dear to mankind, the firſt and beſt of mortals!
Yet ſtill, if this can by ſoft means be done,
And fair accommodation, that is better.
Why ſhould we purchaſe with the blood of thouſands,
What may be gain'd by mutual juſt conceſſion?
Why give up peace, the beſt of human bleſſings,
For the vain cruel pride of uſeleſs conqueſt?

TULLUS.

Theſe ſoothing dreams of philoſophic quiet
Are only fit for unfrequented ſhades.

The ſage ſhould quit the buſy buſtling world,
Ill ſuited to his gentle meditations,
And in ſome deſert find that peace he loves.

GALESUS.

Miſtaken man! Philoſophy conſiſts not
In airy ſchemes, or idle ſpeculations:
The rule and conduct of all ſocial life
Is her great province. Not in lonely cells
Obſcure ſhe lurks, but holds her heavenly light
To ſenates and to kings, to guide their councils,
And teach them to reform and bleſs mankind.
All policy but hers is falſe and rotten;
All valour not conducted by her precepts
Is a deſtroying fury ſent from hell
To plague unhappy man, and ruin nations.

TULLUS.

To ſtop the waſte of that deſtroying fury
Is the great cauſe and purpoſe of this war.
Art thou a friend to peace?—ſubdue the Romans.
Who, who, but they have turn'd this ancient land,
Where, from Saturnian times, harmonious concord
Still lov'd to dwell, into a ſcene of blood,
Of endleſs diſcord, and perpetual rapine?
The ſword, the vengeful ſword, muſt drain away
This boiling blood, that thus diſturbs the nations!
Talk not of terms. It is a vain attempt
To bind th' ambitious and unjuſt by treaties:
Theſe they elude a thouſand ſpecious ways;
Or if they cannot find a fair pretext,
They bluſh not in the face of Heaven to break them.

GALESUS.

Why then affronted Heaven will combat for us.
Set juſtice on our ſide, and then my voice

Shall be as loud for war as thine; my ſword
Shall ſtrike as deep; at leaſt my blood ſhall flow
As freely, Tullus, in my country's cauſe.
But as I then would die to ſerve the Volſcians,
So now I dare to ſerve them by oppoſing,
Even with my ſingle voice, th' impetuous torrent
That hurries us away beyond the bounds
Of temperate wiſdom; and preſume to tell thee,
It is thy paſſion, not thy prudence, dictates
This haughty language.

TULLUS.

Yes, it is my paſſion,
A paſſion for the glory of my country,
That ſcorns your narrow views of timid prudence.
Our injur'd honour drew our ſwords, and never
Shall they be ſheath'd while I command the Volſcians,
Till Rome ſubmits to Antium.

GALESUS.

Rome will periſh
Ere ſhe ſubmit; and ſhe has ſtill her walls,
The ſtrength of her allies, her native valour,
Which oft has ſav'd her in the worſt extremes,
And, ſtronger yet than all, deſpair, to aid her.

TULLUS.

All theſe will nought avail her, if our fears
Come not to her aſſiſtance—But, Galeſus,
Why urge you this to me? Go, talk to Marcius.
The war has given him all his pride could hope for,
To ſee Rome's ſenate humbled at his feet:
He now may wiſh to reign in peace at Antium,
And thou, perhaps, art come an envoy from him,
To learn if I ſhall prove a quiet ſubject.

GALESUS.

Thro' this unguarded opening of thy ſoul,
I ſee what ſtings thee—Ah! beware of envy!
If that pale fury ſeize thee, thou art loſt!
Tullus, 'tis eaſier far, from the clear breaſt,
To keep out treacherous vice, than to expel it.
Farewel. Remember I have done my duty.

[*Goes out.*

TULLUS, *alone.*

This man diſcerns my heart—Well: What of that?
Am I afraid its movements ſhould be ſeen?
I, whoſe clear thoughts have never ſhunn'd the light,
Muſt I now ſeek to hide them? O misfortune!
To have reduc'd myſelf to ſuch a ſtate,
So much beneath the greatneſs of my ſoul,
That, like a coward, I muſt learn to practiſe
The wretched arts of vile diſſimulation!
By Heaven, I will not do it—I will not ſtoop
To veil my diſcontent a moment longer.
But ſee! my rival comes, the happy Marcius.
His haughty mien, his very looks, affront me.

SCENE III.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Tullus, I have receiv'd intelligence,
That a ſtrong body of the Latine troops
Is in full march to raiſe the ſiege of Rome.
Another day will bring them to its aid.
But go thou forth, and lead the valiant bands,
By thee commanded, to repel theſe ſuccours.
Go, and cut off from Rome its laſt reſource.

TULLUS.

I lead my troops from the great ſcene of action,
From falling Rome, which, ere to-morrow's ſun
Shall ſet, may be our prey! ſure you forget
My rank and ſtation—I diſdain the ſervice:
Give it to ſome you may command. For me,
I own no maſter but the Volſcian ſtates.
Rome is my object. I from Antium brought
The nobleſt army ever ſhook her walls.
And ſhall I now, on that deciſive day,
Doom'd by the gods to lay her pride in aſhes,
Shall I be abſent from the glorious work?
It is the higheſt outrage even to think it.—
Juſt gods! doſt thou preſume to give thy orders
To me? to me! thy equal in command?
Nay, thy ſuperior? was it not my hand,
My laviſh hand, beſtow'd thy power upon thee?
And know, proud Roman, that the man who gave it,
Can at his will reſume it.

CORIOLANUS.

I propos'd
This expedition to thee as thy friend,
Not as thy general, Tullus. We are both
Commanders here; and for my ſhare of pow'r,
Whene'er the council of the Volſcian ſtates,
Who cloth'd me with it, ſhall again demand it,
I at their feet will lay it down, perſuaded,
The canker'd tongue of Envy's ſelf muſt own,
That by my ſervice I have well deſerv'd it.

TULLUS.

Was it to them, or me, you hither came
To crave protection? Was not then your fortune,
Your liberty, your life, at my diſpoſal?

I rais'd you from the duſt, a wretched exile,
An outcaſt, helpleſs, friendleſs, driven to beg,
The loweſt refuge which deſpair can ſeek,
Shelter amidſt thy foes. My pitying goodneſs
Protected, truſted, and believ'd you grateful.
O ill-plac'd confidence!

CORIOLANUS.

Immortal gods!
Hear I theſe words from Tullus!

TULLUS.

What for all this
Is thy return? Pride; ſelf-ſufficiency;
Councils apart from mine; deſpotic orders;
The glory of the war all pilfer'd from me:
And, to complete the whole, a Latine army
Now conjur'd up to draw me from the ſiege;
Till by cajoling our tame chiefs, and dazzling
The ſenſeleſs eyes of the low mob of ſoldiers,
Thou ſhalt be ſolely ſeated in the power
Which, thank my folly! now is ſhar'd betwixt us.

CORIOLANUS.

O indignation!—Down, thou ſwelling heart—
I will be calm—I will.—Thou doſt accuſe me
Of the worſt vice that can debaſe mankind,
Of black ingratitude. On what foundations?
What have I done to merit ſuch a charge?
Is it my fault, if in the Volſcian army
My name is as rever'd and great as thine?
Can I forbid authority, and fame,
To follow merit and ſucceſs?—You knew
The man whom you employ'd, and ſhould have known
He would not be a cypher in employment.

TULLUS.

Think'ſt thou my heart can better brook than thine
To be that cypher; that diſhonour'd tool!
Subſervient to th' ambition of another?
Gods! I had rather live a drudging peaſant
Unknown to glory, in ſome Alpin village,
Than at the head of theſe victorious legions
Bear the high name of chief, without the power.
No, Marcius, no. I will command indeed:
And thou ſhalt learn, with all the Volſcian army,
To treat their general with reſpect.

CORIOLANUS.

Reſpect!
O Tullus! Tullus! by the Powers divine!
I bore thee once reſpect, as high as man
Can ſhew to man. From thee, my foe, my rival,
I nor diſdain'd nor fear'd to aſk protection.
You gave me all I aſk'd, you gave me more,
With noble warmth of heart! which to eſteem,
Added the ties of gratitude and friendſhip.
Whatever ſince, in council or in arms,
Has been by me atchiev'd, was done for thee.
My glory all was thine. The palms I gain'd
Only compos'd a garland for his brow,
Who rais'd this baniſh'd man to tread on Rome.

TULLUS.

To tread on him who rais'd him—That, I know,
Is thy ambitious purpoſe: but be certain,
However Rome may bend beneath thy fortune,
Thou ſhalt not find an eaſy conqueſt here.

CORIOLANUS.

May Jove with lightning ſtrike me to the centre,
If from the day I ſaw thy face at Antium,

My heart has ever form'd one ſecret thought
To hurt thy honour, or depreſs thy greatneſs:
I was thy friend, thy ſoldier, and thy ſervant.
But now I will as openly avow,
Thy jealouſy has, with envenom'd breath,
Made ſuch a ſudden ravage in our friendſhip,
I know what to think.——

TULLUS.

Think me thy foe.
There is no laſting friendſhip with the proud.

CORIOLANUS.

Nor with the jealous——But of this enough.
Come let us turn our fire a nobler way:
We have a worthier quarrel to purſue.——
It were unjuſt, diſhonourable, baſe,
Our pride ſhould hurt the Volſcian cauſe.

TULLUS.

No, Marcius,
I mean to guard it better for the future:
The Volſcian cauſe is ſafeſt with a Volſcian.
I therefore claim, inſiſt upon my right;
That you ſhall yield me my command in turn.
The firſt attack was yours: 'Tis ſcanty juſtice,
The ſecond ſhould be mine.

CORIOLANUS.

Tullus, 'tis yours.
O it imports not which of us command!
Give me the loweſt rank among your troops:
All Italy will know, the voice of fame
Will tell all future times, that I was preſent;
That Coriolanus in the Volſcian army
Aſſiſted, when imperial Rome was ſack'd;

That city which, while he maintain'd her cauſe,
Invincible herſelf, made Antium tremble.

TULLUS.

What arrogant preſumption!

SCENE IV.

To them VOLUSIUS, *entering haſtily.*

TULLUS.

Ha! Voluſius,
Thy looks declare ſome meſſage of importance.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, they do—I was to find thee, Marcius.
To thee a ſecond deputation comes,
Thy mother, and thy wife, with a long train
Of all the nobleſt ladies Rome can boaſt,
In mourning habits clad, approach our camp,
Preceded by a herald, to demand
Another audience of thee.

CORIOLANUS.

How, Voluſius!
Said you, the Roman ladies! Low, indeed,
Muſt be the ſtate of Rome, when thus her matrons
She ſends amidſt the tumults of a camp,
To beg protection for the men, who lie
Trembling behind their ramparts—come! once more!
And ſee me put an end to prayers and treaty!

SCENE V.

TULLUS, VOLUSIUS.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, 'tis well. This anſwers to my wiſhes.

TULLUS.

How? What is well? That humbled Rome once more
Shall deck him with the trophies of our arms?

VOLUSIUS.

And hop'ſt thou nothing from this bleſt event?
They who have often blaſted mighty heroes,
Who oft have ſtoln into the firmeſt hearts,
And melted them to folly; they, my friend,
Will do what wiſdom never could effect.

TULLUS.

Think'ſt thou the prayers and tears of wailing women
Can ſhake the man, who with ſuch cold diſdain
Stood firm againſt thoſe venerable conſuls,
And ſpurn'd the genius of his kneeling country?

VOLUSIUS.

It was his pride alone that made him ours.
That paſſion kept him firm; the flattering charm
Of humbling thoſe, who in their perſons bore
The whole collected majeſty of Rome.
Theſe women are no proper objects for it:
He cannot triumph o'er his wife and mother.
On this my hopes are founded, that theſe women
May by their gentler influence ſubdue him.

TULLUS.

Whate'er th' event, he ſhall no longer here,
As wave his paſſions, dictate peace or war.
Whether his ſtubborn ſoul maintains its firmneſs,
Or yields to female prayers, the Volſcian honour
Will be alike betray'd. If Rome prevails,
He ſtops our conquering arms from her deſtruction;
If he rejects her ſuit, he reigns our tyrant.
But, by th' immortal gods! his ſhort-liv'd empire
Shall never ſee yon radiant ſun deſcend.

VOLUSIUS.

Bleſt be thoſe gods that have at laſt inſpir'd thee
With reſolution equal to thy cauſe,
The cauſe of liberty!

TULLUS.

Be ſure, Voluſius,
If that ſhould happen which thy hopes portend;
Should he, by Nature tam'd, diſarm'd by love,
Reſpite the Roman doom—he ſeals his own:
By Heaven! he dies.

VOLUSIUS.

Let me embrace thee, Tullus!
Now breaking from the cloud, which, like the ſun,
Thy own too bounteous beams had drawn around thee.

TULLUS.

You was deceiv'd, my friend. When I with tameneſs,
With tameneſs which aſtoniſh'd thy brave ſpirit,
Seem'd to ſubmit to that unequal ſway
He arrogated o'er me; know, my heart
Ne'er ſwell'd ſo high as in that cruel moment.
My indignation, like th' impriſon'd fire
Pent in the troubled breaſt of glowing Ætna,

Burnt deep and ſilent: but, collected now,
It ſhall beneath its fury bury Marcius!
'Tis fixt. Our tyrant dies.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, my ſword
Here claims to be employ'd.—Nor mine alone—
There are ſome worthy Volſci ſtill remaining,
Who think with us, and pine beneath the laurels
A Roman chief beſtows.

TULLUS.

Go, find them ſtrait,
And bring them to the ſpace before his tent;
'Tis there he will receive this deputation.
Then if he ſinks beneath theſe women's prayers—
Or if he does not—But, Voluſius, wait,
I give thee ſtricteſt charge to wait my ſignal.
Perhaps I may find means to free the Volſci
Without his blood. If not—we will be free.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Trumpets ſounding.

The ſcene diſcovers the camp, a crowd of Volſcian *officers with files of ſoldiers drawn up as before. Enter* Coriolanus, Tullus, Galeſus, Voluſius. *The* Roman *ladies advance ſlowly from the depth of the ſtage, with* Veturia *the mother of* Coriolanus, *and* Volumnia *his wife, at their head, all clad in habits of mourning.* Coriolanus *ſtands at the head of the* Volſci, *ſurrounded by his lictors; but, when he perceives his mother and wife, after ſome ſtruggle, he advances, and goes haſtily to embrace them.*

CORIOLANUS *advancing.*

LOWER your faſces, lictors——
Oh Veturia!
Thou beſt of parents!

VETURIA.

Coriolanus, ſtop.
Whom am I to embrace? A ſon, or foe?
Say, in what light am I regarded here?
Thy mother, or thy captive?

CORIOLANUS.

Juſtly, Madam,
You check my fondneſs, that, by nature hurry'd,
Forgot I was the general of the Volſci,
And you a deputy from hoſtile Rome.
[*He goes back to his former ſtation.*
I hear you with reſpect. Speak your commiſſion.

VETURIA.

Think not I come a deputy from Rome.
Rome, once rejected, ſcorns a ſecond ſuit.
You have already heard whate'er the tongue
Of eloquence can plead, whate'er the wiſdom
Of ſacred age, the dignity of ſenates,
And, virtue can enforce. Behold me here,
Sent by the ſhades of your immortal fathers,
Sent by the genius of the Marcian line,
Commiſſion'd by my own maternal heart,
To try the ſoft, yet ſtronger powers of Nature.
Thus authoriz'd, I aſk, nay, claim a peace,
On equal, fair, and honourable terms,
To thee, to Rome, and to the Volſcian people.
Grant it, my ſon! Thy mother begs it of thee,
Thy wife, the beſt, the kindeſt of her ſex,
And theſe illuſtrious matrons, who have ſooth'd
The gloomy hours thou haſt been abſent from us.
We, by whate'er is great and good in nature,
By every duty, by the gods, conjure thee!
To grant us peace, and turn on other foes
Thy arms, where thou may'ſt purchaſe virtuous glory.

CORIOLANUS.

I ſhould, Veturia, break thoſe holy bonds
That hold the wide republic of mankind,
Society, together; I ſhould grow,
A wretch, unworthy to be call'd thy ſon;
I ſhould, with my Volumnia's fair eſteem,
Forfeit her love; theſe matrons would deſpiſe me—
Could I betray the Volſcian cauſe, thus truſted,
Thus recommended to me—No, my mother,
You cannot ſure, you cannot aſk it of me!

VETURIA.

And does my ſon ſo little know me? me!
Who took ſuch care to form his tender years,
Left to my conduct by his dying father?
Have I ſo ill deſerv'd that truſt? alas!
Am I ſo low in thy eſteem, that thou
Should e'er imagine I could urge a part
Which in the leaſt might ſtain the Marcian honour?
No, let me periſh rather! periſh all!
Life has no charms compar'd with ſpotleſs glory!
I only aſk, thou would'ſt forbid thy troops
To waſte our lands, and to aſſault yon city,
Till time be given for mild and righteous meaſures.
Grant us but one year's truce: mean while thou may'ſt
With honour and advantage to both nations,
Between us mediate a perpetual peace.

CORIOLANUS.

Alas! my mother! that were granting all.

VETURIA.

Canſt thou refuſe me ſuch a juſt petition,
The firſt requeſt thy mother ever made thee?
Canſt thou to her intreaties, prayers, and tears,
Prefer a ſavage, obſtinate revenge?
Have love and nature loſt all power within thee?

CORIOLANUS.

No,—in my heart they reign as ſtrong as ever.
Come, I conjure you, quit ungrateful Rome,
Come, and complete my happineſs at Antium,
You, and my dear Volumnia—There, Veturia,
There ſhall you ſee with what reſpect the Volſci
Will treat the wife and mother of their general.

VETURIA.

Treat me thyſelf with more reſpect, my ſon;
Nor dare to ſhock my ears with ſuch propoſals.
Shall I deſert my country, I who come
To plead her cauſe? Ah no! A grave in Rome
Would better pleaſe me, than a throne at Antium.
How haſt thou thus forſaken all my precepts?
How haſt thou thus forgot thy love to Rome?
O Coriolanus, when with hoſtile arms,
With fire and ſword, you enter'd on our borders,
Did not the foſtering air, that breathes around us,
Allay thy guilty fury, and inſtil
A certain native ſweetneſs thro' thy ſoul?
Did not your heart thus murmur to itſelf?
" Theſe walls contain whatever can command
" Reſpect from virtue, or is dear to nature,
" The monuments of piety and valour,
" The ſculptur'd forms, the trophies of my fathers,
" My houſehold gods, my mother, wife, and children!"

CORIOLANUS.

Ah! you ſeduce me with too tender views!—
Theſe walls contain the moſt corrupt of men,
A baſe ſeditious herd; who trample order,
Diſtinction, juſtice, laws, beneath their feet,
Inſolent foes to worth, the foes of virtue!

VETURIA.

Thou haſt not thence a right to lift thy hand
Againſt the whole community, which forms
Thy ever-ſacred country—That conſiſts
Not of coeval citizens alone:
It knows no bounds: it has a retroſpect
To ages paſt; it looks on thoſe to come;
And graſps of all the general worth and virtue.

Suppoſe, my ſon, that I to thee had been
A harſh obdurate parent, even unjuſt;
How would the monſtrous thought with horror ſtrike
thee,
Of plunging, from revenge, thy raging ſteel
Into her breaſt who nurſt thy infant years!—

CORIOLANUS.

Rome is no more! that Rome which nurs'd my youth:
That Rome, conducted by Patrician virtue,
She is no more! My ſword ſhall now chaſtiſe
Theſe ſons of pride and dirt! Her upſtart tyrants!
Who have debas'd the nobleſt ſtate on earth
Into a ſordid democratic faction.
Why will my mother join her cauſe to theirs?

VETURIA.

Forbid it, Jove! that I ſhould e'er diſtinguiſh
My intereſt from the general cauſe of Rome;
Or live to ſee a foreign hoſtile arm
Reform th' abuſes of our land of freedom.
[*Pauſing.*
But 'tis in vain, I find, to reaſon more.
Is there no way to reach thy filial heart,
Once fam'd as much for piety as courage?
Oft haſt thou juſtly triumph'd, Coriolanus;
Now yield one triumph to thy widow'd mother;
And ſend me back amidſt the loud acclaims,
The grateful tranſports of deliver'd Rome,
The happieſt far, the moſt renown'd of women!

CORIOLANUS.

Why, why, Veturia, wilt thou plead in vain?

TULLUS, *aſide to* VOLUSIUS.

See, ſee, Voluſius, how the ſtrong emotions
Of powerful nature ſhake his inmoſt ſoul!

See how they tear him.—If he long reſiſts them,
He is a god, or ſomething worſe than man.

VETURIA.

O Marcius, Marcius! canſt thou treat me thus?
Canſt thou complain of Rome's ingratitude,
Yet be to me ſo cruelly ungrateful?
To me! who anxious rear'd thy youth to glory?
Whoſe only joy, theſe many years, has been,
To boaſt that Coriolanus was my ſon?
And doſt thou then renounce me for thy mother?
Spurn me before theſe chiefs, before thoſe ſoldiers,
That weep thy ſtubborn cruelty? Art thou
The hardeſt man to me in this aſſembly?
Look at me! Speak!

[*Pauſing, during which he appears in great agitation.*

Still doſt thou turn away?
Inexorable? ſilent?—Then, behold me,
Behold thy mother, at whoſe feet thou oft
Haſt kneel'd with fondneſs, kneeling now at thine,
Wetting thy ſtern tribunal with her tears.

CORIOLANUS. [*Raiſes her.*

Veturia, riſe. I cannot ſee thee thus.
It is a ſight uncomely, to behold
My mother at my feet, and that to urge
A ſuit, relentleſs honour muſt refuſe.

VOLUMNIA. [*Advancing.*

Since, Coriolanus, thou doſt ſtill retain,
In ſpite of all thy mother now has pleaded,
Thy dreadful purpoſe, ah! how much in vain
Were it for me to join my ſupplications!
The voice of thy Volumnia, once ſo pleaſing;
How ſhall it hope to touch the huſband's heart,

When proof againſt the tears of ſuch a parent?
I dare not urge what to thy mother thou
So firmly haſt deny'd—But I muſt weep—
Muſt weep, if not thy harſh ſeverity,
At leaſt thy ſituation. O permit me
[Taking his hand.
To ſhed my guſhing tears upon thy hand!
To preſs it with the cordial lips of love!
And take my laſt farewel!

CORIOLANUS.

Yet, yet, my ſoul,
Be firm, and perſevere—

VOLUMNIA.

Ah Coriolanus!
Is then this hand, this hand to me devoted,
The pledge of nuptial love, that has ſo long
Protected, bleſs'd, and ſhelter'd us with kindneſs,
Now lifted up againſt us? Yet I love it,
And, with ſubmiſſive veneration, bow
Beneath th' affliction which it heaps upon us.
But O! what nobler tranſports would it give thee!
What joy beyond expreſſion! couldſt thou once
Surmount the furious ſtorm of fierce revenge,
And yield thee to the charms of love and mercy.
Oh make the glorious trial!

CORIOLANUS.

Mother! wife!
Are all the powers of Nature leagu'd againſt me?
I cannot! will not—Leave me, my Volumnia!

VOLUMNIA.

Well, I obey—How bitter thus to part!
Upon ſuch terms to part! perhaps for ever!—

But tell me, ere I hence unroot my feet,
When to my lonely home I ſhall return,
What from their father, to our little ſlaves,
Unconſcious of the ſhame to which you doom them,
What ſhall I ſay?

[*Pauſing: He highly agitated.*

Nay, tell me, Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS.

Tell thee! What ſhall I tell thee? See theſe tears!
Theſe tears will tell thee what exceeds the power
Of words to ſpeak, whate'er the ſon, the huſband,
And father, in one complicated pang,
Can feel—But leave me;—even in pity leave!
Ceaſe, ceaſe, to torture me, my dear Volumnia!
You only tear my heart; but cannot ſhake it;
For by th' immortal gods, the dread avengers
Of broken faith!——

VOLUMNIA. [*Kneeling.*

Oh ſwear not, Coriolanus!
O vow not our deſtruction!

VETURIA.

Daughter, riſe.
Let us no more before the Volſcian people
Expoſe ourſelves a ſpectacle of ſhame.
It is in vain we try to melt a breaſt,
That to the beſt affections Nature gives us,
Prefers the worſt—Hear me, proud man! I have
A heart as ſtout as thine. I came not hither,
To be ſent back rejected, baffled, ſham'd,
Hateful to Rome, becauſe I am thy mother:
A Roman matron knows, in ſuch extremes,
What part to take—And thus I came provided.

[*Drawing from under her robe a dagger.*

Go! barbarous ſon! go! double parricide!
Ruſh o'er my corſe to thy belov'd revenge!
Tread on the bleeding breaſt of her, to whom
Thou ow'ſt thy life!—Lo, thy firſt victim!

CORIOLANUS.

Ha! [*Seizing her hand.*

What doſt thou mean?

VETURIA.

To die, while Rome is free,
To ſeize the moment ere thou art her tyrant.

CORIOLANUS.

O uſe thy power more juſtly! Set not thus
My treacherous heart in arms againſt my reaſon.
Here! here! thy dagger will be well employ'd;
Strike here! and reconcile my fighting duties.

VETURIA.

Off! Set me free!—Think'ſt thou that graſp, which binds
My feeble hand, can fetter too my will?
No, my proud ſon! Thou canſt not make me live,
If Rome muſt fall!—No power on earth can do it!

CORIOLANUS.

Pity me, generous Volſci!—You are men—
Muſt it then be?—Confuſion!—Do I yield?
What is it? Is it weakneſs? Is it virtue?—
Well!—

VETURIA.

What? Speak!

CORIOLANUS.

O, no!—my ſtifled words refuſe
A paſſage to the throes that wring my heart.

VETURIA.

Nay, if thou yieldeſt, yield like Coriolanus;
And what thou do'ſt, do nobly!

CORIOLANUS. [*Quitting her hand.*

There!—'Tis done!—
Thine is the triumph, Nature!

[*To* Veturia, *in a low tone of voice.*

Ah Veturia!
Rome by thy aid is ſav'd—but thy ſon loſt.

VETURIA.

He never can be loſt, who ſaves his country.

CORIOLANUS. [*Turning to the* Roman *Ladies.*

Ye matrons, guardians of the Roman ſafety,
You to the ſenate may report this anſwer.
We grant the truce you aſk. But on theſe terms:
That Rome, mean-time, ſhall to a peace agree,
Fair, equal, juſt, and ſuch as may ſecure
The ſafety, rights, and honour of the Volſci.

[*To the troops.*

Volſci, we raiſe the ſiege. Go, and prepare,
By the firſt dawn, for your return to Antium.

[*As the troops retire, and* Coriolanus *turns to the* Roman *Ladies;*

TULLUS. [*To* Voluſius, *aſide.*

'Tis as we wiſh'd, Voluſius—To your ſtation.
But mark me well—Till thou ſhalt hear my call,
I charge thee not to ſtir. One offer more
My honour bids me make to this proud man,
Before we ſtrike the blow—If he rejects it,
His blood be on his head.

VOLUSIUS.

Well! I obey you.

[*He goes out.*

CORIOLANUS.

Be it thy care, Galeſus, that a ſafeguard
Attend theſe noble matrons back to Rome.

SCENE II.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

I plainly, Tullus, by your looks diſcern
You diſapprove my conduct.

TULLUS.

Caius Marcius,
I mean not to aſſail thee with the clamour
Of loud reproaches, and the war of words;
But, pride apart, and all that can pervert
The light of ſteady reaſon, here to make
A candid fair propoſal.

CORIOLANUS.

Speak. I hear thee.

TULLUS.

I need not tell thee, that I have perform'd
My utmoſt promiſe. Thou haſt been protected;
Haſt had thy ampleſt, moſt ambitious wiſh:
Thy wounded pride is heal'd, thy dear revenge
Completely ſated; and, to crown thy fortune,
At the ſame time, thy peace with Rome reſtor'd.

Thou art no more a Volſcian, but a Roman.
Return, return; thy duty calls upon thee,
Still to protect the city thou haſt ſav'd:
It ſtill may be in danger from our arms.

CORIOLANUS.

Inſolent man! Is this thy fair propoſal?

TULLUS.

Be patient—Hear me ſpeak—I have already
From Rome protected thee; now from the Volſci,
From their juſt vengeance, I will ſtill protect thee.
Retire. I will take care thou may'ſt with ſafety.

CORIOLANUS.

With ſafety!—Heav'ns!—And think'ſt thou, Coriolanus
Will ſtoop to thee for ſafety? No! my ſafeguard
Is in myſelf, a boſom void of blame,
And the great gods, protectors of the juſt.—
O 'tis an act of cowardice and baſeneſs,
To ſeize the very time my hands were fetter'd,
By the ſtrong chain of former obligations,
The ſafe ſure moment to inſult me—Gods!
Were I now free, as on that day I was,
When at Corioli I tam'd thy pride,
This had not been.

TULLUS.

Thou ſpeak'ſt the truth: It had not.
O for that time again! Propitious gods,
If you will bleſs me, grant it!—Know, for that,
For that dear purpoſe, I have now propos'd
Thou ſhould'ſt return. I pray thee, Marcius, do it!
And we ſhall meet again on nobler terms.

CORIOLANUS.

When to the Volſci I have clear'd my faith,
Doubt not I ſhall find means to meet thee nobly.
We then our generous quarrel may decide
In the bright front of ſome embattled field,
And not in private brawls, like fierce barbarians.

TULLUS.

Thou canſt not hope acquittal from the Volſci.

CORIOLANUS.

I do:—Nay more, expect their approbation,
Their thanks! I will obtain them ſuch a peace
As thou durſt never aſk; a perfect union
Of their whole nation with imperial Rome
In all her privileges, all her rights.
By the juſt gods, I will! What would'ſt thou more?

TULLUS.

What would I more! Proud Roman; This I would;
Fire the curs'd foreſt where theſe Roman wolves
Haunt and infeſt their nobler neighbours round them;
Extirpate from the boſom of this land,
A falſe perfidious people, who, beneath
The maſk of freedom, are a combination
Againſt the liberty of human-kind,
The genuine ſeed of outlaws and of robbers.

CORIOLANUS.

The ſeed of gods!—'Tis not for thee, vain boaſter!
'Tis not for ſuch as thou, ſo often ſpar'd
By her victorious ſword, to talk of Rome,
But with reſpect and awful veneration.
Whate'er her blots, whate'er her giddy factions,

There is more virtue in one ſingle year
Of Roman ſtory, than your Volſcian annals
Can boaſt thro' all your creeping dark duration!

TULLUS.

I thank thy rage. This full diſplays the traitor.

CORIOLANUS.

Ha! traitor!

TULLUS.

Firſt, to thy own country, traitor!
And traitor, now, to mine!

CORIOLANUS.

Ye heavenly Powers!
I ſhall break looſe—My rage—But let us part—
Leſt my raſh hand ſhould do a haſty deed
My cooler thought forbids.

TULLUS.

Begone—Return—
To head the Roman troops. I grant thee quittance
Full and complete of all thoſe obligations
Thou haſt ſo oft inſultingly complain'd
Fetter'd thy hands. They now are free. I court
The worſt thy ſword can do; whilſt thou from me
Haſt nothing to expect, but ſure deſtruction.
Quit then this hoſtile camp. Once more I tell thee,
Thou art not here one ſingle hour in ſafety.

CORIOLANUS.

Think'ſt thou to fright me hence?

TULLUS.

Thou wilt not then?
Thou wilt not take the ſafety which I offer?

CORIOLANUS.

Till I have clear'd my honour in your council,
And prov'd before them all, to thy confuſion,
The falſehood of thy charge; as ſoon in battle
I would before thee fly, and howl for mercy,
As quit the ſtation they have here aſſign'd me.

TULLUS.

Voluſius! Hoa!

SCENE III.

To them VOLUSIUS, *and Conſpirators, with their ſwords drawn.*

TULLUS.

Seize and ſecure the traitor!

CORIOLANUS.

[*Laying his hand upon his ſword.*
Who dares approach me, dies!

VOLUSIUS.

Die thou!

[*As* Coriolanus *draws his ſword,* Voluſius *and the Conſpirators ruſh upon and ſtab him.* Tullus *ſtanding by without having drawn his ſword.*

CORIOLANUS.

[*Endeavouring to free himſelf.*
Off!—Villains!

[*Falling.*
O murdering ſlaves! Aſſaſſinating cowards! [*Dies.*

SCENE IV.

[*Upon the noiſe of the tumult, enter haſtily to them* GALESUS, *the other deputies of the* Volſcian *States, Officers, friends of* Coriolanus, *and* TITUS *with a large band of ſoldiers.*

GALESUS.

[*As he enters.*

Are we a nation rul'd by laws, or fury?
How? whence this tumult?—— [*Pauſing.*
Gods! what do I ſee?
The noble Marcius ſlain!

TULLUS.

You ſee a traitor
Puniſh'd as he deſerv'd, the Roman yoke
That thrall'd us broken, and the Volſci free!

GALESUS.

Hear me, great Jove! Hear, all you injur'd Powers
Of friendſhip, hoſpitality, and faith!
By that heroic blood, which from the ground,
Reeking to you for vengeance cries, I ſwear!
This impious breach of your eternal laws,
This daring outrage on the Volſcian honour,
Shall find in me a rigorous avenger!
On the ſame earth, polluted by their crime,
I will not live with theſe unpuniſh'd ruffians!

TULLUS.

This deed is mine: I claim it all!—Theſe men,
Theſe valiant men, were but my inſtruments,
To puniſh him who to our face betray'd us.

We ſhall not fear to anſwer to the Volſci,
In a full council of the ſtates at Antium!
The glorious charge of having ſtabb'd their taitor!

GALESUS.

Titus, till then ſecure them.

[Tullus *and Conſpirators are led off.*

[Galeſus, *ſtanding over the body of* Coriolanus, *after a ſhort pauſe, proceeds.*

Volſcian fathers,
And ye, brave ſoldiers, ſee an awful ſcene,
Demanding ſerious ſolemn meditation.
This man was once the glory of his age,
Diſintereſted, juſt, with every virtue
Of civil life adorn'd, in arms unequal'd.
His only blot was this; that, much provok'd,
He rais'd his vengeful arm againſt his country.
And, lo! the righteous gods have now chaſtis'd him,
Even by the hands of thoſe for whom he fought.

Whatever private views and paſſions plead,
No cauſe can juſtify ſo black a deed:
Theſe, when the angry tempeſt clouds the ſoul,
May darken reaſon, and her courſe controul;
But when the proſpect clears, her ſtartled eye
Muſt from the treacherous gulph with horror fly,
On whoſe wild wave, by ſtormy paſſions toſt,
So many hapleſs wretches have been loſt.
Then be this truth the ſtar by which we ſteer,
Above ourſelves *our* COUNTRY *ſhould be dear.*

EPILOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MRS. WOFFINGTON.

WELL! Gentlemen! and are you ſtill ſo vain
To treat our ſex with arrogant diſdain;
And think, to you alone by partial Heaven,
Superior ſenſe and ſovereign power are given;
When in the ſtory told to-night, you find,
With what a boundleſs ſway we rule the mind,
And, by a few ſoft words of ours, with eaſe,
Can turn the proudeſt hearts juſt where we pleaſe?
If an old mother had ſuch powerful charms,
To ſtop a ſtubborn Roman's conquering arms,—
Soldiers and ſtateſmen of theſe days, with you
What think you would a fair young miſtreſs do?
If with my grave diſcourſe, and wrinkled face,
I thus could bring a hero to diſgrace,
How abſolutely may I hope to reign,
Now I am turn'd to my own ſhape again!
However, I will uſe my empire well;
And, if I have a certain magic ſpell
Or in my tongue, or wit, or ſhape, or eyes,
Which can ſubdue the ſtrong, and fool the wiſe,
Be not alarm'd: I will not interfere
In ſtate affairs, nor undertake to ſteer
The helm of government,—as we are told
Theſe female politicians did of old:

EPILOGUE.

Such dangerous heights I never wiſh to climb——
Thank Heaven I better can employ my time——
Aſk you to what my power I ſhall apply?
To make my ſubjects bleſt, is my reply.
My purpoſes are gracious all, and kind.
Some may be told—and ſome may be divin'd:
One, which at preſent I have moſt at heart,
To you without reſerve I will impart:
It is my ſovereign will,—Hear, and obey,—
That you with candour treat this *Orphan Play*.

THE END.